



RICHARD BAXTER (1615-1691)
Dr Williams's Library

Other ages have but heard of Antinomian doctrines, but have not seen what practicall birth they travailed with as we have done... . The groanes, teares and blood of the Godly; the Scornes of the ungodly; the sorrow of our friendes; the Derision of our enemies; the stumbling of the weake, the hardening of the wicked; the backsliding of some; the desperate Blasphemyes and profanenes[s] of others; the sad desolations of Christs Churches, and woefull scandall that is fallen on the Christian profession, are all the fruites of this Antinomian plant.

Richard Baxter, 1651

DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER

DOUGLAS JOHN COOPER

RICHARD BAXTER AND ANTINOMIANISM

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Abbreviations:

<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>BQ</i>	<i>Baptist Quarterly</i>
<i>CCRB</i>	N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall (eds), <i>Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter</i> , 2 vols, Oxford, 1991.
<i>DNB</i>	L. Stephens and S. Lee (eds), <i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> , 23 vols, 1937-1938.
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>ET</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>LW</i>	Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds), <i>Luther's Works</i> , Philadelphia and St Louis, 1955-1986.
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>Rel. Bax.</i>	Matthew Sylvester (ed.), <i>Reliquiae Baxterianae, Or, Mr. Richard Baxters Narrative of The most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times</i> , 1696.
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>Works</i>	Richard Baxter, <i>The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: With a Preface Giving Some Account of the Author, and of this Edition of his Practical Works: An Essay on his Genius, Works and Times; and a Portrait</i> , 4 vols, Ligonier, PA, 1990-1991.

A Note on Quotations and References

In the quotation of primary sources several principles have been observed throughout this thesis. All dates have been modernised. Original spelling has been maintained, but obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected, and all contractions have been silently extended. Italicisation has also been retained, except when quotations are completely italicised; in these cases the italics has been silently removed. Punctuation remains unchanged, except in places where obfuscation would result. Such changes are signalled by square brackets. The only significant alteration is in the use of square brackets, which have been silently replaced in all quotations from primary published material or private correspondence. Where they served as speech or quotation marks, these have been used. Where they functioned as rounded brackets, these also have been used. Thus all square brackets now signal additions to the quoted text.

Each reference to the correspondence includes the names of sender and recipient, and the date of each letter. These dates have been extracted from N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall's *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter*. All quotations from the correspondence have been referenced in the following way: DWL [Dr. Williams's Library] MS [Manuscript] BC [Baxter Correspondence] [volume] vi. [folio] 120r (CCRB [letter] #54). The same format is used for the treatises, except that *BT* replaces *BC*, and the item number is added. For example, DWL MS *BT* vii. 1r, item #218 (CCRB #1150). This is consistent with Hans Boersma's referencing system in *A Hot Pepper Corn*. In all references the place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

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Abstract

In the following pages the soteriological and literary career of Richard Baxter (1615-1691) is charted *vis-a-vis* seventeenth-century English Antinomianism, an increasingly marginalised doctrine of justification by faith alone without works through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. Whereas historians have previously seen this doctrine as a by-product of high Calvinism, this thesis argues that it found its origins in Luther; and where they contend that the Antinomians (such as Tobias Crisp or John Saltmarsh) were radical subversives, this thesis responds by demonstrating their conservative aspirations.

Antinomianism provides a valuable marker with which to measure Baxter's progress through the seventeenth century. Essentially, this thesis explains why his personality and convictions reacted so heatedly to Antinomianism; it establishes the pattern whereby his fear of Antinomianism waxed and waned on three occasions throughout his life; it accounts for his fear, by linking it to the context of the 1640s, where law and obedience seemed everywhere under threat; it assesses the nature of his various attempts to eradicate Antinomian doctrine wherever he found it; and, finally, it describes the effect of his encounters with Antinomianism on his own soteriology. None of this has ever been explored in detail.

This study draws on a wide range of published and private source material, by Baxter, the "Antinomians" and their opponents alike. It begins by surveying Baxter's enormous historiography; it then sets Antinomianism in its historical context, before distilling the personal reasons why Baxter found it so objectionable. Its second half surveys Baxter's career in the light of Antinomianism, describing its recrudescence in the later seventeenth century and Baxter's attempts to beat it back. Ultimately, it seeks to show why Antinomianism is a valuable spotlight that throws new illumination on both Richard Baxter and his seventeenth-century English world.

INTRODUCTION

In a period of English history that overflowed with energy, colour and intensity, Richard Baxter stands out as one of the more intriguing and interesting of seventeenth-century figures. This is not to celebrate or adulate the man; the causes of his prominence and the nature of his reputation were not always positive. It is simply to recognise that the study of a man whose life spanned more than three quarters of the century, who lived in the reigns of five kings, one republic and two Protectors, who was born before the rise of Arminianism and who died after the Glorious Revolution, and who was often at the heart of dramatic events in between, will provide an illuminating glimpse into seventeenth-century history and society. This is especially true, given that he was so prolific an author, such a key player and so strident a voice.

Indeed, there is no shortage of Baxter: his range and depth of interests are staggering; his literary output is remarkable; and the abundance of extant source material concerning this one man alone is almost overwhelming. And that is why it is necessary almost to dissect Baxter, and to observe one element of his life at a time. This thesis, therefore, follows the example of William Lamont's *Richard Baxter and the Millennium*.¹ Just as Lamont's focus on the millennium opened up new vistas in

¹ William Lamont, *Richard Baxter and the Millennium*, 1979.

historians' understanding of Baxter, so it is hoped that this study will also shed new light on the man and his world.

There is also no shortage of material written about Baxter. Not all of it is historical, of course; not all is of an equal standard; and despite the quantity of discussion, important issues about Baxter remain unresolved. To begin with, there is the nature of Baxter's personality and temperament. He has long been considered the champion of Christian catholicity; his motto was unity in things necessary, liberty in things unnecessary, and charity in all. He was supposedly the man who rose above his rancorous age. "The tone was set by [Samuel] Coleridge, who saw Baxter as a good man who had fallen into the seventeenth century".² Yet his contemporaries certainly considered him one of their own. He could foot it with the best of them at being cantankerous, bitter, pedantic, critical, sarcastic and hostile. There is enormous tension between his supposed distaste for controversy and his constant eagerness to embark upon it. Why did Baxter's irenic ambitions take shape in offensive contention and result in further alienation?

This is a very important question if his abiding resentment at Antinomianism is to be understood, since this was an area of controversy that consumed his attention. "I have accordingly judged it my duty", he disclosed in his 1655 *Confession*, "to bend my self against [the Antinomians] in all my writings".³ It is not surprising, then, that most historians have assumed that Baxter's concern with Antinomianism was a constant feature of his career. But he did not bend himself against them in all his writings. A brief survey of Baxter's publication record reveals that there were periods in which he was silent on the subject, just as there were other phases in which he was heated and vocal in

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³ Richard Baxter, *Rich. Baxter's Confession of his Faith, Especially concerning the Interest of Repentance and sincere Obedience to Christ, in our Justification and Salvation*, 1655, p. 4.

his attack. For instance, beginning with the *Aphorismes of Justification* in 1649, a long line of publications emerged in the 1650s dedicated to eradicating Antinomianism, yet in the following decade Baxter wrote none. What made the difference between silence and speech? Moreover, he continued to publish after others had fallen silent, and when even he had recognised the Antinomians were no longer a threat. So why did a man who vigorously sought peace and unity continue to attack his fellow Protestants even when they appeared to be beaten? Why was he provoked to enter controversy, why did he prolong it, and why Antinomianism?

On the face of it, Antinomianism looks harmless enough. The Antinomians sought to stay true to the Protestant touchstone of justification by faith alone, without works, through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. They argued that obedience should be rendered to God out of gratitude for the gift of salvation to believers, a justification that had been settled since before the creation of the world. They maintained that only this doctrine was capable of producing good works empowered by the Holy Spirit, and not the individual's efforts. Yet in his many instalments of splenetic prose Baxter condemned Antinomianism as the death of the Christian religion, the inversion of all that was good and precious, and the embodiment of heresy. His outrage is astonishing. It is intriguing that Baxter - a pastor supposedly given to generosity for other points of view - should overlook the Antinomians' expressed desire to promote good works and set himself in heated and lifelong opposition. It is reasonable to question whether his attack was in proportion to the actual danger of Antinomianism to English religion, and it is necessary to ponder what he found so threatening about it.

To continue the survey of Baxter's writings is also to observe, finally, that the bulk of his initial attacks on Antinomianism emerged in the years following the English Civil War and the regicide. This juxtaposition may be entirely accidental, of course, but it is also possible that the two were linked. After all, the very idea of Antinomianism - the word means "against the law"⁴ - revolved around such concerns as law, authority and obedience, and England had recently seen those cherished values trampled underfoot. It may well be that Baxter's involvement in the Antinomian debate was so aggressive and intense because it embodied issues that extended well beyond mere theology. It is fruitful, then, to test for links between Baxter's experience in the 1640s and his own soteriological transformation during that decade from mild support for Antinomianism to outright hostility. There may also have been a connection between the creation of relative stability in the later years of the Protectorate and the falling away of Baxter's publications against Antinomianism. And if it is found that there was a link between the trauma of the civil war years and Baxter's anti-Antinomianism, this would raise intriguing questions about the nature of seventeenth-century soteriological debate, and the fears and tensions of English society at the time.

In this light Baxter's first published work, the *Aphorismes of Justification* (1649), becomes increasingly important. It was easily one of Baxter's most controversial and significant works. It launched his public campaign against Antinomianism, it laid out his recently formulated soteriological system and it aroused sustained controversy in Calvinist circles. Many accused the book and its author of Arminianism, and William Lamont accepts that the book was an attempt to gain favour for Arminian doctrine. It is essential now to consider the accuracy of these assessments, and to evaluate the effect of Antinomianism on the doctrine Baxter there laid out. This has not been done before.

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"Antinomianism" stems from the Greek word, *nomos*, meaning "law".

Indeed, the content of the book has never been dealt with in any depth, and the context of its publication - just after the regicide and at the beginning of Baxter's attacks on Antinomianism - has not been wholly appreciated. It will also be productive to compare that work with later utterances by Baxter on soteriological issues. It may be more a product of the moment - a moment imbued with Antinomianism - than anyone has ever suspected. A re-evaluation of the *Aphorismes* in the light of Baxter's heated opposition to Antinomianism will prove very fruitful indeed.

It is necessary also to reconsider Baxter's soteriology in general. For years historians have struggled to define him by conventional labels, but Hans Boersma has finally offered the authoritative theological assessment of Baxter's soteriological position.⁵ Boersma is not content with easy answers, and his perceptive analysis captures the subtlety of Baxter's system. Yet it remains to be seen whether that system was a constant during Baxter's lifetime, and it would be intriguing to see if the emphases within it varied over time. The influences upon his soteriology - firmly rooted in the historical context, and with particular focus on Antinomianism - have never been extracted and evaluated, and it is essential now to consider them as well. Therefore, this thesis not only seeks to parallel William Lamont's *Richard Baxter and the Millennium*, it also offers a historical complement to Boersma's theological discussion of Baxter's soteriology, *A Hot Pepper Corn*.

All of this has important implications for historians' understanding of England's mid-century upheavals. For years historians have been determined to find an English Revolution in those developments, yet their efforts have come under increasing attack in

⁵ Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn. Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy*, Zoetermeer, 1993.

recent years. Many are now emphasising the conservative aspects of that “Revolution”.⁶ This thesis seeks to extend the discussion by evaluating the nature of the Revolution’s radicals, the Antinomians. Claimed by socialist historians as the revolutionaries of seventeenth-century England, the Antinomians may not have been so extreme or radical in their aspirations. It also reflects on the motives and fears of those who opposed Antinomianism, in order to determine whether its revolutionary character was largely an imaginary creation which reveals less about the Antinomians than it does about their critics.

Yet the importance of Antinomianism extends beyond this mid-century crisis. This thesis also explores the trends in its reappearances in the later seventeenth century, seeking to understand how it influenced Baxter’s soteriological perceptions and his public and private campaign to counteract its recrudescence. His response reveals much about the nature of his concerns, and the ways in which he could use the label “Antinomian” to different ends. And while it is a difficult task, it is also worthwhile to measure Baxter’s contribution to the eventual extinction of Antinomianism in England at the end of the seventeenth century.

A wealth of source material is available to help answer these questions. For a start, there are Baxter’s numerous published works. Those concerned with ecclesiology (especially *vis-a-vis* the Roman Catholics in general and the conformists in the Restoration period) have little to contribute and have of necessity been largely ignored. All other works, though, have been assessed in terms of what they reveal about Baxter and Antinomianism. This includes Baxter’s many practical works. He was a pastor at heart, and any analysis of his soteriology which ignores its practical application is

⁶ For example, see Alastair MacLachlan, *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England. An Essay on the Fabrication of Seventeenth-Century History*, New York, 1996.

lacking, especially when Antinomianism had so many implications for Christian practice. Most important, however, have been Baxter's soteriological works. They are the most revealing about the nature of Baxter's soteriological system, his hostile attitude towards Antinomianism, the reasons for that antipathy and its rise and decline. Obviously it has been necessary also to make use of Baxter's autobiography, the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, but only with great care. Self-justification percolates throughout the work, and its subjective analysis is (despite Baxter's best intentions) not always reliable. For all that, though, it remains a valuable and essential source.⁷

The amount of evidence available in Baxter's published works is considerable in itself, but this study would still be woefully incomplete without an analysis of Baxter's private papers and correspondence. Most of this material is housed at the Dr Williams's Library in London, and the remainder is held at the British Library. Geoffrey F. Nuttall and N. H. Keeble's superlative *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter* performs a wonderful service by opening up Baxter's correspondence to the researcher.⁸ Without that essential contribution this study would never have achieved the same depth of research. It is the private material that reveals the real Baxter, and it helps to complete a full and balanced picture of the man. It is the correspondence and the treatises that provide vital confirmation of Baxter's soteriological progress through the seventeenth century.

It has also been necessary to survey a wide range of publications by other authors. The "Antinomians" had to be considered, of course. This study attempts to listen carefully to what John Eaton, Tobias Crisp, John Saltmarsh, William Dell and other Antinomians actually said, and to measure that with the accusations of their detractors,

⁷ See Appendix A, "The *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696)", pp. 303-308.

⁸ N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall (eds), *The Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter*, 2 vols, Oxford, 1991.

such as Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Gataker and, of course, Richard Baxter. The survey of these other writers has been extremely useful in comparing their conceptions with those of Baxter himself. The comparison demonstrates what a muddle the Antinomian debate could be. Finally, the Antinomian controversy as it continued after Baxter's death has also been dealt with. This was done to assess whether Baxter really did cast such a long shadow over nonconformity, and to explore what, if anything, the contributors to this debate said about this famous anti-Antinomian. Once again, the analysis has been extremely rewarding, and surprising.

No one has ever considered in any depth Baxter's aversion to Antinomianism or the progress of his own soteriological development. Both of these foci yield impressive and interesting rewards. With so many significant advances in Baxter studies over the last twenty years - Lamont's *Millennium*, Boersma's *Hot Pepper Corn*, and Nuttall and Keeble's *Calendar* - this is an avenue of study more accessible and more imperative than ever before.

The thesis itself is divided into two parts. The first part is largely thematic. It begins by assessing previous trends, weaknesses and strengths in Baxter's vast historiography. A discussion of Antinomianism in its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historical context follows, before a consideration of Baxter himself, his personality and the inner compulsions that reacted so strongly against that Antinomianism. The second part traces the developments of Baxter's soteriological and literary career with reference to Antinomianism. Three chapters, covering the period from 1640 to 1700, explore the interaction of context, fear and soteriology; they record Baxter's various crusades to eradicate Antinomian doctrine; and, finally, they briefly discuss his impact and reputation after his death in 1691.

This is a rich and colourful story, and one that has not been told before; the vital key of Antinomianism has never been used to unlock Baxter's thought and development. Still, this study comes after many others, and it is only appropriate to establish its historiographical context, before delving into the historical context of these two great antagonists: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism.

~ PART ONE ~

Chapter One

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL INHERITANCE

*We ought to be quite clear about when he was saying it, and to whom;
the emphases change with time and audience.¹*

No work of scholarship emerges from an intellectual vacuum, and its historiographical cards should be laid on the table; debts must be acknowledged, and presuppositions clarified in the light of previous work. In order to understand Richard Baxter and Antinomianism it is essential, first, to weigh up past approaches to Baxter, and to select the most useful for present purposes. Likewise, any discussion of Antinomianism needs to show familiarity with previous analyses, if only to avoid their errors. Finally, it is necessary to circumscribe the gap in the historiography regarding the collision of this man and Antinomianism in seventeenth-century England.

Richard Baxter

Historians, theologians and devotional writers have been generous in the attention they devote to Baxter. To study the man is not just to confront his own persistent patronage

¹ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 88.

of the printing press, it is also to conquer an imposing amount of historiography. In order to tame this vast territory, it is useful to extract three types of approach to Baxter; that is, three distinct analytical patterns shared by a number of authors. This is important, because the goal of this study is to come as close as possible to achieving a comprehensive historical understanding of Baxter, in particular relation to Antinomianism. These three approaches are not equally able to deliver that result. Indeed, two of them share inherent weaknesses which place significant barriers in the way of achieving an accurate representation of this complex seventeenth-century figure. Therefore, the most relevant approach must be identified before the task can be begun.

The first of these three approaches has largely been the preserve of the nineteenth-century clergyman,² although its effect has lingered on well into the twentieth century. It might be called the “sympathetic approach”, and it is characterised by hagiography, a whiggish tendency to see Baxter as the perfect representation of a worthy tradition, and an interpretation of Baxter that is unremittingly generous. Its effect is to distance Baxter from the realm of ordinary humanity by elevating him beyond all weakness, inconsistency and error; and to detach him from his context, by reading the nineteenth-century world into his own. This was the dominant approach in the vast majority of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century discussions of Baxter.

Examples of this endemic sympathy are not hard to find. James Stephen, for instance, remarked that in his soteriological studies Baxter had thrown “an incredible multitude and variety of crosslights, as effectually to dazzle any intellectual vision less

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See *ibid.*, p. 20.

aquiline than his own”.³ Others, baffled by Baxter’s complicated theological distinctions,⁴ would not have put the matter so kindly. Alexander Grosart was unrestrained in his praise of Baxter. “I stand in admiration”, he enthused; “I am awed by the quantity of being in [Baxter], and the prodigiousness of his vitality... . [T]ears come unbidden, and my heart leaps to my throat as I discover the tireless willingness of this man to be helpful”.⁵ Even the occasional qualification was hard pressed to suggest any alternative view. “We have not been desirous to speak about Baxter because we are prepared to give to his life unqualified sympathy, but rather because we can give to him almost unqualified admiration”.⁶

This sympathy had two profound effects. First, it elevated Baxter above the ranks of ordinary humanity, and offered him saintly status. In his effusive description of this “Paul of the seventeenth century”, for example, John Stoughton was hardly credible in his application of Baxter:

It is with blended admiration and shame that the author paints the picture, with whatever feelings the reader may look on it. The hand trembles while the pencil moves, only truthfully, without giving any exaggeration either in outline or colouring - trembles to think of the sad, sad contrast which the character of the painter presents to that great original... . [A] holy soul, like Baxter, is adapted to inspire and strengthen a like spirit in your breast.⁷

And a true picture of Baxter was unlikely to emerge from a flowery introduction by W. H. Haden, which reinforced the perception that Baxter was a man above humanity. Haden attributed to him not just extraordinary moral grandeur, but also some measure of eternal immutability. “Richard Baxter was a man of unusual moral stature”, he

³ James Stephen, “The Practical Works of Richard Baxter”, in *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, 4th ed., 1860, p. 362.

⁴ See, for example, Baxter’s list of thirty-six “chief Distinctions”, Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification, With their Explication annexed. Wherein also is opened the nature of the Covenants, Satisfaction, Righteousnesse, Faith, Works, &c.*, 1649, pp. [337-347].

⁵ Alexander B. Grosart, “Richard Baxter: Seraphic Fervour”, *Representative Nonconformists*, 1879, pp. 113, 121.

⁶ [-] “Richard Baxter”, *The Eclectic Review*, n.s. 1 (1861), p. 260.

⁷ John Stoughton, “Richard Baxter: or, Earnest Decision”, in *Lights of the World: Or, Illustrations of Character Drawn From The Records of Christian Life*, New York, 1853, pp. 157, 170, 175.

marvelled, “a man of spiritual splendour and of surpassing mental gifts. He rises out of a welter of words, many of them his own, as a lighthouse rises out of the sea. Richard Baxter, the man, will always shine”.⁸ It is ironic indeed that Haden’s article, entitled “Richard Baxter - The Man”, should begin by setting him firmly apart from men, but it was an inevitable outworking of the excessive sympathy which the nineteenth century bestowed on Baxter.

Not only was Baxter being elevated above humanity, he was also being detached from his seventeenth-century world, which made him even more malleable in the hands of these nineteenth-century nonconformists. They assumed that Baxter’s “mind and writings would meet many of our modern difficulties”.⁹ This might not have been so dangerous, but it very often led them to accentuate those features of Baxter’s world that resembled their own, and to distort or omit those aspects that did not. “The minister of the gospel”, to choose a rather extreme example,

as a Christian patriot, is bound to concern himself in the public interests of his country... . In these tumultuous times, when our own country is sympathizing in the agitations of other countries; when such a vast variety of elements enter into American society; and where there are so many tendencies, which awaken solicitude for the future; it will not do for the minister to shut himself up in his study, or within the bounds of his parish, knowing and concerning himself little on what takes place in this land, and in the wicked world at large.¹⁰

Like some square historical peg, Baxter was being squeezed into a round contemporary hole. He could be shaped almost beyond recognition in the hands of sympathetic nineteenth-century writers who were at the same time all too aware of present needs.

The problem with the sympathetic approach, as William Lamont impishly observes, was that it emphasised “the special qualities of [Baxter], which made his writings precious to a nineteenth-century gardener faced with a spiritual crisis”. This

⁸ W. H. Haden, “Richard Baxter - The Man”, *BQ*, n.s. 3 (1926), p. 150.

⁹ “Richard Baxter”, *Eclectic Review*, p. 257.

¹⁰ [-] “Richard Baxter”, *Quarterly Register of the American Education Society*, 4 (1831), p. 6.

was not without dangerous effect. "The very readiness of the nineteenth-century Nonconformist", Lamont continues, "to see affinities with the experiences of the seventeenth-century Puritan is, from this angle of vision, a delusion".¹¹ It created the illusion of accessibility, making it all too easy for the nineteenth-century writer to imagine that the world he was describing was much like his own.¹²

Not only that, in their adulation of Baxter these writers were too much inclined to believe everything he said; they could hardly bring themselves to doubt their seventeenth-century hero. This in turn led them to place too great a reliance on Baxter's autobiography, the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*. They all believed that "though the story is his own, we may safely trust him. There is an unmistakably honest ring about the man".¹³ This intense devotion to the *Reliquiae* facilitated the most common way of dealing with Baxter in the nineteenth century, the expansion of his life and times.¹⁴ Be they short or long, these life histories all but paraphrased Baxter's autobiography; they followed its structure and they swallowed whole its content. By offering unquestioning allegiance to a book that requires great caution in its use, they failed to gain an accurate appreciation of Baxter. Once more their sympathy for him got in the way, and obscured the true picture of the man.

¹¹ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

¹³ John Brown, "Richard Baxter, the Kidderminster Pastor", in *Puritan Preaching in England: A Study Past and Present*, 1900, p. 169. For similar sentiments see also George P. Fisher, "The Writings of Richard Baxter", *Bibliotheca Sacra and American Biblical Repository*, 9 (1852), p. 323; J. H. Davies, *The Life of Richard Baxter, of Kidderminster, Preacher and Prisoner*, 1887, p. 100; George Jackson, "Richard Baxter's Autobiography", *ET*, 27 (1916), p. 377; and, more recently, Margaret Bottrall, "Richard Baxter", in *Every Man a Phoenix*, 1958, p. 119. See Appendix A, "The *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696)", pp. 303-308, for discussion of this view.

¹⁴ For a few examples of this kind of treatment see Hugh Stowell, *Brief Memoirs of the Life, Character, and Writings of the Rev. R. Baxter*, 2nd ed., Wellington, 1826; Joseph Napier, "Richard Baxter and his Times" in *Lectures Delivered Before The Young Men's Christian Association*, Dublin, 1862; Davies, *Life of Richard Baxter*; E. A. George, "Richard Baxter 1615-1691", in *Seventeenth Century Men of Latitude*, 1909.

Those who wrote about Baxter in the first half of this century were unlikely to escape entirely from this nineteenth-century legacy, and there are remnants of it even in recent discussions.¹⁵ It is certainly present in J. I. Packer's 1954 D.Phil. dissertation, "The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter".¹⁶ Packer lets slip the nature of his approach in the very first sentence of his work. "The object of this study", he confesses, "is to furnish a full sympathetic exposition of Richard Baxter's doctrine".¹⁷ And in his conclusion he willingly admits that he has "aimed to give a sympathetic presentation of [the] material, and so ha[s] largely eschewed critical judgements".¹⁸ His admission is only too true. "I have found in Baxter nothing but the dazzling precision of a man who knows exactly what he thinks and how to say it... . His thought was so clear that contemporaries, blinded by its dazzling lucidity, found it hopelessly obscure".¹⁹ Moreover, Packer is too inclined to take Baxter at his word. He generously allows Baxter to "speak for himself as far as possible...[since] Baxter was both an acute observer and a competent historian".²⁰ In putting forward this approach Packer is reflecting a collection of sentiments that had been the driving force in Baxter studies for over a century.

The sympathetic approach may have its devotional uses, but it is never able to offer an accurate assessment of Baxter. In the end it falls victim to its own ironies: the emphasis on his similarities with later nonconformists is an attempt to draw him near,

¹⁵ For example, see Owen C. Watkins, "*Reliquiae Baxterianae*", in *The Puritan Experience*, 1972. Watkins' discussion accepts the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* at face value throughout; it makes present-day application (p. 126); it endorses the honour Baxter has received (p. 131); it discounts criticism of Baxter (p. 133); and it adds further praise (p. 135).

¹⁶ J. I. Packer, "The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter", D.Phil thesis, Oxford, 1954.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. (a).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. ii, 72. (There are shades of James Stephen here. Compare his quotation above, p. 12.)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

but it only results in greater alienation; likewise, the attempt to make him accessible renders the reality of his life ever more inaccessible; the desire to applaud him actually does Baxter a grave disservice; and the effort to comprehend him simply produces a construct that is artificial in its reproduction of the man. The sympathetic approach is a dead end, because it can only offer a vision which is thoroughly tainted by the nineteenth century, and a Baxter bereft of time and place. It is necessary, then, to expunge the cloying sympathy which has all too often permeated Baxter's historiography. It is essential to abandon the sympathetic approach, and to adopt one that is capable of offering a more faithful representation of Richard Baxter.

The "theological approach" provides a second alternative. Obviously, the focus of this approach is to understand the theology of Baxter, usually by laying out his soteriological "system". What is so intriguing is that, while different in nature from the sympathetic approach, it actually shares the same weaknesses. With its emphasis on consistency it removes Baxter from normal human confines of change, development and contradiction. And by focusing only on his ideas, it transforms Baxter into an abstract theory, detached once more from any significant time or place. The emphasis is on content, while the context is largely ignored.²¹ The ultimate irony of the theological approach is that by treating Baxter as a vehicle for understanding theology, his own relevance to the endeavour is diminished; he becomes simply a means to an end. While the theological approach enjoys fewer exponents than does the sympathetic, it exerts just as much influence, and certainly merits serious consideration here.

²¹ It would be wrong for me to claim that I have not been helped - particularly in the text/context dichotomy - by Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), pp. 3-53. I have, however, reached most of these conclusions independently.

An emphasis on consistency necessarily underpins the theological approach. Theologians such as J. I. Packer and Hans Boersma seek to extract Baxter's theological system from his writings. The inescapable assumption of their task is that this system will be consistent. It would make a mockery of their approach to believe that Baxter's theology could be contradictory, since their goal is to lay it out in an intensely ordered and logical fashion. To borrow from Conal Condren, "the mere designation of a phenomenon as *a* work, *a* text, [*a* system,] or *an* argument signifies a certain oneness, by specifying a singular entity to be talked about".²² Thus Packer and Boersma are compelled to discover internal coherence and consistency within Baxter's texts. This is dubious enough in itself, but they do so in the face of a long tradition that has emphasised his inconsistency.

To begin with, there were Baxter's contemporaries who lampooned his inconsistency. Roger L'Estrange, the hostile guardian of the printing press, saw in Baxter

*the spectacle of a man Labouring under Contradictions, and Inconsistencies with himself... . What can be more Reasonable now, than to confront him with himself: and to oppose Mr. Baxter the Divine, to Mr. Baxter the Politician; the man of Love, Order, and Truth, to the man of Wrath, Confusion, and Paradox?"*²³

L'Estrange was not alone. "Calvinism and Arminianism have a Consistency", Samuel Young proclaimed in his damning critique of Baxter's memoirs, "but *Baxterianism* hath none, but is a meer Gallimophery, Hodg-podg Divinity".²⁴ Thomas Long, another enemy of the nonconformists, also wrote his hostile account of Baxter's life in part to

²² Conal Condren, *The Status and Appraisal of Classic Texts. An Essay on Political Theory, Its Inheritance and the History of Ideas*, Princeton, 1985, p. 143.

²³ Roger L'Estrange, *The Casuist Uncas'd in a Dialogue Betwixt Richard and Baxter With a Moderator Between Them For Quietnesse Sake*, 2nd ed., 1680, preface.

²⁴ Samuel Young, *Vindiciae Anti-Baxterianae, Or, Some Animadversions On a Book Intituled Reliquiae Baxterianae; Or, the Life of Mr. Richard Baxter*, 1696, p. 111.

show “how often Mr. *Baxter* hath contradicted himself”;²⁵ he believed that contradiction and inconsistency were part of his defensive mechanisms. He even claimed he could “make up one Volume more of Mr. *B[axter]*’s Works, such, as though he be able to split a hair, he shall never be able to reconcile”.²⁶

These are hostile witnesses, but even writers within the sympathetic tradition have found the prospect of Baxter’s inconsistency plausible enough to emphasise it. According to one such writer, Baxter was a “bundle of contradictions...a living paradox in many things”.²⁷ Ely Bates cast a generous gloss on the problem, explaining that “a man who writes much, and at different periods, can hardly avoid sometimes falling into real or apparent inconsistency or contradiction”.²⁸ His inclusion of “apparent” suggests this is a reluctant accusation. George Fisher perceived a general maturing in Baxter’s opinions over time,²⁹ while William Orme was more specific. Baxter’s *Aphorismes*, he thought, were a “great number of separate propositions, which are neither always consistent with truth nor with one another”.³⁰

Not only are Packer and Boersma ignoring a substantial tradition, then, they also overlook the reality of human fallibility. Authors such as Baxter did not write their books in isolation, immune from such factors as personal change, institutional pressures, unconscious ambiguities and political repression.³¹ Thus Packer and Boersma are in danger of finding what was not really there: perfect (or near-perfect) consistency in all

²⁵ Thomas Long, *A Review of Mr. Richard Baxter’s life, wherein many mistakes are rectified, some false relations detected, some omissions supplied out of his other books*, 1697, epistle dedicatory.

²⁶ Thomas Long, *The Unreasonableness of Separation: The Second Part... With special Remarks on the Life and Actions of Mr. Richard Baxter*, 1682, p. 162.

²⁷ [-] “Richard Baxter”, *Eclectic Review*, p. 260.

²⁸ Ely Bates, *Observations on Some Important Points in Divinity: Chiefly Those in Controversy between the Arminian and Calvinist...Extracted from the Works of Richard Baxter*, 1811, p. xxxiii.

²⁹ George P. Fisher, “The Theology of Richard Baxter”, *Bibliotheca Sacra and American Biblical Repository*, 9 (1852), p. 138.

³⁰ William Orme, *The Life and Times of Richard Baxter with a Critical Examination of his Writings*, 1830, vol. 2, p. 41.

³¹ MacLachlan, *Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England*, pp. 266-267.

of Baxter's many texts over several eventful decades of life and writing. But both writers steadfastly refuse to entertain the notion of Baxter's inconsistency.

Baxter's most vociferous defender on this point is J. I. Packer, who is determined to believe that "Baxter was as exact and consistent a thinker as any in the church's history". And so "we may begin by dismissing as completely baseless the idea that Baxter's theology is vague and inconsistent. Nothing could be further from the truth".³² Packer goes on to explain that the problem was with Baxter's readers, who in failing to understand his system accused him of inconsistency and obscurity. Indeed, Packer believes that he has discovered the "key" to Baxter's system, which banishes the illusion of inconsistency:

I suspect that the impression of obscurity which Baxter's books have given to his critics is due to their failure to grasp the key which unlocks his system: his so-called 'political method', which none of them mentions. When the grounds and nature of this 'method' are understood, the appearance of arbitrariness and confusion vanishes, and everything falls into place.³³

Packer's point is important enough to repeat in his conclusion:

We have now examined this 'method' in detail... And, once its outlines are grasped, everything in Baxterianism falls into place; the puzzles solve themselves, and the disconcerting distinctions are seen to flow naturally from the system's heart. A more exact and integrated body of thought it would be hard to find.³⁴

Thus the mystery is revealed. Baxter was not inconsistent after all; that was merely the delusion of his "lazy and careless" readers who failed to employ the key to his system, or even failed to realise there was a system at all.³⁵

Packer is by no means alone in his conviction. More recently, Hans Boersma is also inclined to see consistency wherever he looks,³⁶ and he echoes Packer's defence, if a little more mildly. "Baxter's theological system", Boersma concludes,

³² Packer, "Redemption and Restoration", p. 456.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. ii-iii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 456.

³⁶ See, for instance, Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 177, 268.

is a tightly knit unit. Packer has rightly drawn attention to its consistency... . Once Baxter's theological method is grasped, the various pieces fit together. Prior to one's unlocking of Baxter's theological system, however, it is often difficult to locate its constitutive elements. This lack of understanding may result in an inaccurate portrayal of his theology.³⁷

Boersma differs from Packer only by saying that there was not one key to Baxter's theological system, but two.

Packer is mistaken in his analysis, however, when he identifies Baxter's 'political method' as 'the key which unlocks his system.' It is my contention that the 'political method' unlocks only half of his theology: God's will *de debito*, as *Rector*. The other half is God's will *de rerum eventu*, which is his will as *Dominus Absolutus*. Packer recognizes that Baxter uses this distinction. It seems to me that should have prevented him from making Baxter's 'political method' the key to understanding his theology.³⁸

This is not much of an improvement on Packer's reductionism.

Of course, it is certainly true that as deep a thinker as Baxter will bring a fair degree of consistency to his writing, and that his detractors on this point have not always been particularly fair-minded or insightful. It is also true that Boersma's dichotomy is a crucial step in making sense of Baxter's theology. But to labour Baxter's unshakeable consistency is to elevate him beyond the realms of common human failing. Packer and Boersma allow no place for contradiction, no place for change and no place for shifting emphases. Neither do they imagine the possibility that Baxter may have used the same words but with different meanings or intentions at different times. Their Baxter is all immutability.

Not only do these writers distance Baxter from fundamental human weakness, they also detach him from his seventeenth-century English world. Because they are striving to lay out Baxter's theological "system", to borrow their word, the context in which Baxter wrote is largely irrelevant to their task. Their emphasis is on content, not context. Consider this admission by J. I. Packer:

I have wherever possible allowed Baxter to speak for himself. When he wrote so much, and so much of it so well, on all the topics to be covered, any other course seemed foolish. No reports

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8. See also p. 194.

could match the vividness and force of his own plain, terse, pithy prose... . [I] endorse [William] Orme's verdict: 'Among the printed works of Baxter sufficient is to be found already on all the subjects of which they treat' .³⁹

Packer can take Baxter at his word because he wrote "it" so well. That "it" and those "subjects", of course, are theology. Thus Baxter is merely a means to an end; a conduit through whom a theologian might travel to gain a better grasp of timeless soteriological truth. The man himself is optional and disposable. In a real sense he is not the focus at all. And the effect is to give Baxter an air of disembodied timelessness. He could have lived in any age or time, but given what he wrote he would still be useful for Packer's purposes.

Boersma is not so obviously seeking to understand theology through Baxter, but to understand Baxter's own view of theology. He is, however, more intensely theoretical, and his rigorous theoretical analysis drains the colour from his conception of Baxter, and blinds him, for example, to the deep pastoral and practical compulsions that were at work in the man.⁴⁰ For instance, in considering Baxter's response to the objections of his opponents on justification

Baxter consistently approaches their positions from his own starting points: the distinction between God's will *de debito* and his will *de rerum eventu*, as well as the distinction of threefold justification, with its emphasis on constitutive justification. Anything which falls beyond the parameters of this framework fails to measure up to the correct definition of justification or pardon.⁴¹

Boersma's Baxter is only concerned with doctrinal correctness in itself. He measures all other opinions by his own theoretical conceptions and distinctions. Anything which cannot be slotted into an established framework of his own devising is discarded, only because of its intellectual failings. Thus Baxter's thought is so purely distilled by Boersma that he is put forward implicitly as one set of unchanging theological doctrines

³⁹ Packer, "Redemption and Restoration", p. iv.

⁴⁰ Packer showed much more awareness of these compulsions. See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 408. He also consulted Baxter's practical works.

⁴¹ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 98.

relating with various other sets of unchanging theological doctrines. He is transformed, essentially, into a “walking theory”, with no significant place or context.

All of this exerts a profound influence on how these writers study Baxter, and the effect is further to sever him from his context. Unshakeable confidence in Baxter’s consistency, for example, allows Boersma to escape into elision. If Baxter was entirely consistent, then it does not matter which of his texts are read as he can always be relied upon to express the same things in the same way. Such questions as the time at which Baxter wrote these texts or the audience he had in mind are emptied of their relevance. The forces which prompted Baxter to write controversial works in any given period are also ignored. Content is again being emphasised at the expense of context, and this enables Boersma to study only a limited range of works.

The first way in which his sources are limited is in time. The books that Boersma cites most frequently, either by Baxter or other authors, are those that were written in the period between 1649 and 1658. They dominate his discussion, yet he fails to explain why these years produced such a flurry of activity. While plucking texts only from periods of intense controversy he also fails to allow for any change in Baxter’s thinking during the intervening years. Neither does he distinguish between years in which there was controversy and years in which there was none, nor recognise the pressures that an atmosphere of controversy could bring to bear on Baxter. All of this helps to bestow on him an air of abstraction; there is no sense of change and development. Indeed, given the premise of Baxter’s consistency, such features are rendered irrelevant from the beginning. Boersma’s use of the present tense is both a symptom of this, as well as a significant cause. Baxter, it would seem, continuously

lived in the present tense; context simply does not matter. Once more, he is disentangled from his world.

Boersma's approach is not only limited in time, it is also limited in scope. He allows himself to ignore the vast bulk of Baxter's writings by focusing only on his controversial, soteriological works. His reasoning is that these works are more pertinent to his discussion.⁴² This is undoubtedly true, but even he concedes "the inseparability of Baxter's doctrinal positions and his practical theology".⁴³ And his limited choice of texts relies on the belief that other works are unlikely to disagree. The absence of Baxter's private correspondence and papers is another serious omission, which imposes severe restrictions on Boersma's ability to track Baxter's chronological development. Boersma is potentially wrong to assume that the material he ignores cannot shed new light on Baxter's theology. And that which is most useful for this purpose is very often that which he allows himself to leave out.

Moreover, Boersma also observes that it was in his controversial works that Baxter was "forced to come to terms with the issues".⁴⁴ This is also true, no doubt, but he overlooks that fact that in his practical works Baxter had to grapple with putting soteriological truths into practice, and come to grips with the issues all over again. That idea is lost on Boersma, who explains that even though "Baxter's practical writings...give valuable insights into his [soteriological] views...[t]hese non-polemical writings will only be used to clarify some matters".⁴⁵ Despite this reluctant acknowledgement, that clarification does not extend very far. The only practical works which Boersma considers are *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* and *The Right Method for a*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Settled Peace of Conscience. Here again, both of these works were published in the early 1650s.⁴⁶ Otherwise Baxter's practical works are almost completely ignored. In the case of Baxter, to whom the practice of Christianity was so important, this is a critical omission. The result of all this is that Baxter is studied through the narrow lens of his soteriological works; the resulting image is equally narrow.

The theological approach is beset with a number of problems that are typified by Boersma's historical introduction.⁴⁷ The only difference from the rest of his book is that Baxter, the theory, interacts with other theories in chronological order. Admittedly some historical background is offered, but its relevance to Baxter's development is not explored and the discussion is dominated by the contents of various disputes in the order in which they occurred. Some use is also made of Baxter's correspondence, but it is another limited (though illuminating) concession. Moreover, out of a chapter of forty pages only nine of them are devoted to the years from 1658 to 1691. The dominance of the 1650s is preserved, and the significance of 1658 remains a mystery. Even when discussing these later years Boersma offers no explanation as to why controversy broke out again in the 1670s and finally in the 1690s. He clearly considers such questions irrelevant.

Ultimately the approach of Packer and Boersma⁴⁸ divorces Baxter once again from the realm of ordinary human existence. Ascribed to him is a level of consistency

⁴⁶ They appeared in 1650 and 1653 respectively.

⁴⁷ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 25-65 (chapter II).

⁴⁸ For two other demonstrations of the theological approach see Gavin McGrath, "Puritans and the Human Will: Voluntarism within mid-seventeenth century English puritanism as seen in the works of Richard Baxter and John Owen", PhD thesis, Durham, 1989. McGrath adopts an explicitly theological approach (pp. 18, 64-66); he ignores any "linear development" in Baxter's thought (p. 61); he agrees with Packer and Boersma on Baxter's consistency (pp. 61, 68); and he relies only on printed, soteriological works (p. 67). See also Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification. English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790. An Evaluation*, Oxford, 1990. Clifford compares John Owen, John Tillotson, John Wesley and Richard Baxter in theological terms. He is accused of not sufficiently contextualising these theologians "within the intellectual environment of their day" (Alister McGrath, "[Review of] *Atonement and Justification...* By Alan C. Clifford", *Journal of Theological Studies*, 42 [1991], p. 198) and, indeed,

beyond normal human capabilities, and he is abstracted to the point of seeming to be nothing more than a collection of timeless theories. These writers further detach him from his world by ignoring the context of his works and by limiting their choice of source material. While the structure of Baxter's thought is analysed in commendable and useful detail,⁴⁹ the bigger question of why he composed that structure is ignored. Indeed, the theological approach is one which imposes severe restrictions on the questions it may ask; what Baxter thought and wrote is given dominion over when he wrote it, why he wrote it and to whom he wrote it. Here again, this approach has its uses, but it cannot offer a full and accurate understanding of Baxter.

Past study of Baxter has been dominated by the sympathetic and the theological approaches to the man. Due to their inherent weaknesses and limitations the cumulative effort to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Baxter has not always advanced very far, even though so much has been written about him. In order to achieve anything like an accurate representation of Baxter an approach must be found that does two things. First, it must accept a Baxter who shared in those failings and weaknesses common to humanity; he must be less than a saint, and more than a theory. Second, it must also accept a Baxter completely at home in the seventeenth century, and be prepared to understand him in terms of the shifting pressures and influences of that context. Indeed, such an approach must embrace both content and context. The text must be seen as intricately connected with the context out of which it emerged, and an acknowledgement of both is essential. Finally, in recognition of Baxter's complexity this approach must be capable of processing an expanded variety of sources, out of

their historical contexts are so varied that his comparison can be justified only on purely theoretical grounds.

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This is especially true of Boersma, whose astute work is an indispensable tool in Baxter studies.

which a fuller picture may be constructed. Such an approach has been progressively developed by the three historians who have dominated Baxter studies this century: F. J. Powicke, Geoffrey F. Nuttall and William Lamont. Theirs might be called the “historical approach”.

The progress of Baxter studies over recent decades owes much to the earlier work of F. J. Powicke, one of its foremost pioneers. Inevitably, Powicke failed to avoid entirely the influence of the sympathetic approach. He was happy, for example, to receive the inheritance of nineteenth-century-style sympathy. The “true genesis” of his biography, he divulged,

lies in the fact that I happen to have been born at Kidderminster; that my earliest associations were with the church that bears Baxter’s name; and that from childhood, I was taught to think of him as constituting the town’s peculiar glory... . [W]ith this feeling I began to read him and learn all I could about him.⁵⁰

Powicke was also inclined to extol Baxter as a model clergyman. “Nor can I help”, he continued, “setting down the conviction that in Baxter the Pastor - which includes Preacher - a modern pastor may still find the richest possible incentive to all that is best and highest in his vocation”.⁵¹ Baxter - the epitome of a worthy tradition - was applied to contemporary circumstances. Elsewhere Powicke was more specific. “I am inclined to say”, he wrote in one essay, “after forty years of experience and observation in the ministry, that one of our urgent needs is concentration... . I am not sure that my point will seem clear or convincing... . Let me, then, take you back to Baxter”.⁵² These tendencies closely connected Powicke with an earlier, sympathetic tradition.

⁵⁰ Powicke, F. J., *A Life Of The Reverend Richard Baxter*, 1924, pp. 8-9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵² F. J. Powicke, “Richard Baxter’s Ruling Passion”, *Congregational Quarterly*, 4 (1926), pp. 302-303. See also “Richard Baxter *Ad Clerum*”, *Expositor*, 8th ser., 16 (1918), pp. 425-440 for another example.

Yet, for all that, Powicke broke important new ground. He introduced a change in emphasis that proved revolutionary in its effects. His most valuable contribution to Baxter's historiography was his concern to see his private papers, unpublished treatises and personal correspondence made more accessible and used more widely. In his two-volume biography he included numerous letters as well as other unpublished material. He also wrote several articles in which he published parts of Baxter's correspondence.⁵³ He was eager, then, to open up a wider range of source material, and in doing so he inevitably broadened the range of questions that he was able to ask and answer. Not only that, he allowed others to see for themselves the potential that lay untapped in Baxter's private papers.

Powicke enjoyed the greatest influence on Geoffrey F. Nuttall, who took up his work (and passion) and advanced it considerably. Indeed, Nuttall was happy to confess that he was Powicke's "Elisha",⁵⁴ and there was undeniable similarity in the "ministry" of the two men. Like Powicke, Nuttall did not escape the influence of the nineteenth-century model entirely. His biography of Baxter was yet another expansion of his life and times that was loyal to the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*. He may not have accentuated the positive nearly as much, yet his work remained essentially within the shell of the favoured nineteenth-century mode of narrative. Nuttall did, however, show further development in this movement away from the nineteenth-century sympathetic model. He was able to place greater distance between himself and earlier sympathies. He was

⁵³ For articles, see F. J. Powicke, "Eleven Letters of John Second Earl of Lauderdale (and First Duke), 1616-1682, to the Rev. Richard Baxter (1615-1691)", *BJRL*, 7 (1922), pp. 73-105; "Richard Baxter and the Countess of Balcarres (1621?-1706?)", *BJRL*, 9 (1925), pp. 585-599; and "An Episode in the Ministry of the Rev. Henry Newcombe, and his Connection with the Rev. Richard Baxter", *BJRL*, 13 (1929), pp. 63-88.

⁵⁴ Nuttall, *Richard Baxter*, 1965, p. viii.

prepared “to emphasise [Baxter’s] more disagreeable personal traits [and to] hold the ‘faults and badness’ in sensitive balance with the enduring virtues”.⁵⁵

Nuttall also continued Powicke’s efforts to make Baxter’s correspondence and papers accessible. His most enduring legacy must surely be his part in the *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter*. By far the most useful tool in the research of Baxter, these two volumes were begun by Nuttall⁵⁶ and completed by his younger friend and fellow Baxter authority, N. H. Keeble.⁵⁷ In it the desires of Powicke and Nuttall for Baxter’s correspondence have come to fruition. This comprehensive survey of Baxter’s letters has helped to transform the nature and breadth of the approach to Baxter.

William Lamont reaps the rewards of this effort. His best-known work on Baxter is *Richard Baxter and the Millennium*. In it Lamont traces Baxter’s career in terms of his shifting affections for the millennium, the civil magistrate and national churches. He charts Baxter’s growing support during the 1650s for the Protectorate, and especially Richard Cromwell, together with his increasing millennial excitement. From there Lamont moves on to trace the fading of Baxter’s millenarian hopes, which were rekindled by his prison research (into the book of *Revelation*) of the mid-1680s and the accession of a firmly Protestant monarchy in 1689. One of Lamont’s most worthwhile insights is Baxter’s growing disillusionment with civil magistracy and national churches, and his increasing attachment to a separatist model. This disillusionment began around 1676 and was reversed during his years in prison. In the course of his

⁵⁵ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 286.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Nuttall had calendered the correspondence by 1965. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter*, p. vii.

⁵⁷ Keeble is unique in fashioning a literary approach to Baxter. It is not fully considered in this chapter, but this is not a reflection on the importance of Keeble’s contribution. Indeed, he has done a great deal to advance a fuller understanding of Baxter. For mild criticism of his approach, however, see William Lamont, “[Review of] N. H. Keeble, *Richard Baxter. Puritan Man of Letters*”, *EHR*, 100 (1985), pp. 182-183.

study Lamont canvasses Baxter's changing interpretations of the civil war and his constant fear of Roman Catholicism.

Lamont demonstrates his advances on Powicke and Nuttall in fashioning a broader approach. To begin with, he completes their move away from sympathy. He is seeking "to escape the oppression of [Baxter's] sainthood";⁵⁸ he does a good job of extracting himself from the inclinations of any sympathy he might have for Baxter;⁵⁹ and he is more than willing to admit that "there was a darker side to Baxter's nature".⁶⁰ His Baxter is recognisably human. In addition, Lamont joins Powicke and Nuttall before him in making careful use of "a wealth of personal manuscript material, much of it curiously untapped",⁶¹ and he specifically acknowledges the aid of Nuttall's *Calendar of the Correspondence* in its pre-published form.⁶² "It is to the private archive we need to turn", he explains, "to find out what made the great English nonconformist tick".⁶³

Thus Lamont is taking up the challenge that these two men laid down, but he also moves beyond them. Where he most significantly avoids the remnants of the sympathetic tradition in Powicke and Nuttall is in his handling of the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, and this has important consequences. Lamont is no longer willing to accept Baxter's autobiography at face value. Instead, he exposes its discrepancies, editorial interference and plain obfuscation of the truth.⁶⁴ As a result, his major work on Baxter is not a recapitulation of his life and times. Instead, it tracks his career from the viewpoint of his millenarian beliefs and ecclesiological conceptions. Lamont's

⁵⁸ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ He admits to these in William Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, 1996, pp. 9, 10.

⁶⁰ Lamont, "[Review of] Keeble", p. 182.

⁶¹ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 10. See also William Lamont, "Arminianism: the controversy that never was", in Nicholas Philipson and Quentin Skinner (eds), *Political Discourse In Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 49.

⁶² Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 323.

⁶³ Lamont, "Arminianism: the controversy that never was", p. 51.

⁶⁴ Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, p. 6.

approach is one that recognises the complexity of Baxter, and the need to study him through one aspect at a time. The questions are broad, and his focus is necessarily narrow.

The seeds of change were sown by Powicke and Nuttall, and they have come to fruition in the work of William Lamont. He is now the leading exponent of the historical approach to Baxter. His employment of this approach has several important characteristics. First, he brings a wider range of questions to bear upon a broader variety of sources, drawing out their full potential. "We ought to be quite clear about when [Baxter] was saying it, and to whom", he warns, "the emphases change with time and audience."⁶⁵ Thus Lamont lays due emphasis upon the context in which Baxter is found at any point in his career,⁶⁶ and in doing so he shatters the myth of coherence which had been built up around him. Lamont portrays him realistically, as a man who changed and developed through a long career. He offers "a sense of progression"; he shows Baxter's "mind on the move".⁶⁷ He makes good use of Baxter's unpublished treatises and letters, not just to provide new information, but also to convey the ebbs and flows of Baxter's life and thought, as well as to reveal what was admired and disdained about him. Where Lamont fails to capitalise fully on this method is in his treatment of the texts themselves. The tone and content of what Baxter wrote in his published works offer a vital "sense of progression"; it is a potential that Lamont leaves largely untapped. Despite this neglect of texts and their content, however, his approach is broad-based and inclusive of material and methods.

⁶⁵ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 88.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 287.

⁶⁷ Lamont, "[Review of] Keeble", p. 182.

And this allows for much more subtle analysis. For example, Lamont is able to recognise the discrepancy between Baxter's public and private self. This has long been overlooked, since the sympathetic approach prefers to ignore any suggestion of inconstancy, and the theological approach is ill-equipped to reveal a private Baxter. But Lamont is able to write of "Baxter's secret self" and "the problem of the two Baxters".⁶⁸ He exposes this most clearly in the introduction to his recent edition of Baxter's *Holy Commonwealth*. There he contrasts Baxter "the abject public penitent" retracting his *Holy Commonwealth*, with "a rather different Baxter, the private man, as revealed from the unprinted sources" warmly recommending the book to a correspondent.⁶⁹ Thus Lamont's approach helps to reconcile Richard and Baxter,⁷⁰ not by demonstrating their consistency, but by charting the progress and direction of Baxter's inconsistency.

This historical approach, therefore, is one that overcomes the weaknesses of its two competitors. First, it does not remove Baxter from the ranks of humanity. It accepts his faults, and its success does not rely on a Baxter who does not change. Far from being an immutable saint, Lamont's Baxter is a man who changes his mind, and who inevitably betrays a darker side. Second, it does not detach Baxter from his context. By abandoning the search for consistency, by embracing a variety of sources, and by asking a broader range of questions the historical approach is able to register the influences and changes through which Baxter lived. It is a method that marries both text and context, not ignoring one at the expense of the other, but often using each one to explain and illuminate the other.

⁶⁸ Lamont, *Millennium*, pp. 24, 288.

⁶⁹ William Lamont (ed.), *Baxter. A Holy Commonwealth*, Cambridge, 1994, p. xix.

⁷⁰ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 289.

Therefore, this thesis adopts an approach to Richard Baxter which, first of all, has very little room for sympathy. Sympathy is a corruption which has prohibited a full and accurate picture of the man with its well-intentioned adulation and generosity. Instead, it seeks to render Baxter as recognisably human, not free from error, misunderstanding or moral failings. Sympathy must be warded off by disinterested balance and objectivity, as far as possible. Moreover, Baxter cannot be distilled from his world, nor can he be dealt with as some kind of “walking theory”. The purpose of this thesis is not to reach through Baxter to any timeless truths, nor to reinforce the illusory myth of coherence. Rather, it recognises that Baxter, like all people, was subject to change and development. It also concedes his complexity, by studying him from the one angle of Antinomianism. Finally, its approach incorporates a broad range of elements: textual analysis, theological awareness, and expansive source material. This is an approach which, potentially, can ask a wide range of questions; the outcome should be an equally wide range of answers.

Antinomianism

The contrast between Baxter’s historiography and that of Antinomianism is startling. Baxter began an avalanche, while Antinomianism has caused hardly any historiographical stir at all. There is no need to compare different approaches to Antinomianism, since so few have considered it a worthwhile destination. Fewer still have seen its connection with Baxter, and none has offered any extended analysis beyond a few, brief observations. Richard Baxter and Antinomianism remains, then, an important gap to fill, and the rewards for doing so are enormous. Not only does the task

offer important conclusions about Baxter, it also raises urgent questions about the nature of Antinomianism.

Setting out an accurate definition of Antinomianism is extremely problematic. A brief comment on its entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* will suffice here, and further analysis of the word in its historical context will be presented in chapter two. An Antinomian, according to its dictionary definition, is one who is “[o]pposed to the obligatoriness of the moral law”. The implication of this is that the denial of the moral law leads to licentiousness, and “Antinomian” quickly gives birth to its more practical synonym, “Libertine”. This is defined, once more in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as the “name given to certain antinomian sects of the early sixteenth century” in continental Europe. Thus a disavowal of the moral law is perceived to be part and parcel of a more practical “[d]isregard of moral restraint, esp[ecially] in relations between the sexes” as well as “licentious or dissolute practices or habits of life”. The one is seen to lead inexorably to the other. “In its broadest application antinomianism means simply licence”.⁷¹ This definition, and this assumption, are usually what historians have in mind when they use the word.

Only one work on English Antinomianism has ever been published, and it is now almost fifty years old. In her book, *Antinomianism in English History With Special Reference to the Period 1640-1660*, Gertrude Huehns emphasises the perfectionist tendencies of Antinomianism, rather than its supposed licentious inclinations. Antinomians, she explains, took the implications that lay at the heart of Christ’s atonement to the extreme by arguing that Christ had provided complete redemption

⁷¹ Timothy J. Wengert, “Antinomianism”, in Hans J. Hillerbrand (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 1, New York, 1996, p. 51.

from the effects of the Fall.⁷² Christians, they demanded, were as perfect as they would ever be. This led to an emphasis on ethical purity, not sinful indulgence, despite the entrenched suspicions of their opponents. Indeed, in the hands of their detractors “Antinomian” became “nothing but a dyslogistic expression of quite indiscriminate application”.⁷³ It was, in other words, yet another mercurial label of abuse. The Antinomians’ desire to raise Christ and grace to the very highest level, together with their emphasis on perfection, were interpreted as an invitation to licentious living.⁷⁴

Huehns’ book contains two significant weaknesses. To begin with, Huehns is too trusting of her sources. She makes heavy use of such commentators as the vitriolic Presbyterian heresiographer, Thomas Edwards, and Richard Baxter, “not very much given to exaggeration”.⁷⁵ Yet these men, though perhaps well placed to offer comment, were hardly models of objectivity. Edwards was especially prone to exaggeration and hostile denunciation of his opponents.⁷⁶ So to rely on these sources is inevitably to introduce grave distortion, yet Huehns shows little awareness of the perils involved.

Second, Huehns contends that Antinomians were “necessarily prone to favour revolutionary solutions in any field of action whatsoever”. In other words, because they had experienced a radical change in themselves - from sinfulness to perfection - they were inclined to view other aspects of life in similarly revolutionary terms.⁷⁷ Yet Huehns is forced to concede that in seventeenth-century England “[t]here appears thus to exist a discrepancy between the prevalence and the performance of antinomianism in

⁷² Huehns, *Antinomianism*, pp. 11-12.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷⁵ For instance, see *ibid.*, pp. 73-74, 80, 89.

⁷⁶ Ian Gentles describes Edwards’ “persistent strain of hysteria”, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645-1653*, Oxford, 1992, p. 89. See also J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History. The Ranters and the Historians*, Cambridge, 1986, pp. 126-127.

⁷⁷ Huehns, *Antinomianism*, p. 18.

the field of practical politics”.⁷⁸ It failed to achieve the type of revolution it was supposedly “prone to favour”.

To solve this dilemma Huehns suggests that Antinomianism was too individualistic, too shapeless, to provide any positive avenue of action, and that without the New Model army (a seedbed for radical ideas) Antinomianism was bereft of any vehicle in which to travel.⁷⁹ Her argument relies on the assumption that parliament’s army was “deeply...imbued with Antinomian sentiments”,⁸⁰ but more recent research plays down the radicalism of that army.⁸¹ So it is possible that Antinomianism achieved little of substance not because it was shapeless, but because there was very little to give shape to. And Huehns’ claim that Antinomianism drained away into the millenarians, the Ranters, the Seekers and the Quakers before eventually disappearing, suggests just how insubstantial her Antinomians might be. Even she concedes these final manifestations of Antinomianism were “of fundamentally different character”.⁸² The link between them is tenuous, yet she is at a loss to offer any alternative explanation for the puzzling disappearance of Antinomianism in England. Huehns presents Antinomianism as a coherent movement, but her own argument suggests that it was illusory.

Leo Solt sees things rather differently, and despite the age of his work, he offers some useful insights into Antinomianism. To begin with, the “term Antinomian is slightly misleading when it is applied to the religious views of the [New Model] Army chaplains. It was employed largely by their critics in order to connote the historical

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79, 89.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁸¹ See below, pp. 154-155.

⁸² Huehns, *Antinomianism*, p. 127.

association of the term with licentiousness and anarchy”.⁸³ Thus Solt uses the word with due caution, refraining from speculating on its spread and influence in the army, and preferring to focus on individual authors and specific doctrines. These “Antinomians” differed from federal theologians in believing that the new covenant was an unconditional gift of God, not a contract of mutual obligations. The “explosive effect of Antinomian theology” lay in the conviction that “faith was being persuaded more or less of Christ’s love” to the believer; the saints were already saved!⁸⁴ While this implied some sort of universal grace - something Antinomianism’s critics picked up on - in fact salvation was extended “only to a few”.⁸⁵

The purpose of Solt’s work is to assess the political implications of Antinomianism. A great many historians assume that it was harnessed to radical political (and religious) aims, but not Solt. He concludes that the Antinomians “did not wish to make religion a stalking-horse for political ends”.⁸⁶ On balance, Antinomianism did not manifest itself in political radicalism, but in conservatism and authoritarianism.⁸⁷ “Antinomianism, then, failed to transmute its theology into concrete political terms”,⁸⁸ unlike Huehns, though, Solt detects no inexorable connection or progression.

This kind of measured analysis contrasts with that of Christopher Hill, who is more than willing to believe that an Antinomian style of theology was “profoundly and intolerably subversive of law and order”.⁸⁹

Antinomians stressed the complete freedom of the regenerate - restrained by no law, not even the Mosaic Law, by no rulings of churches, not even by the texts of the Bible... . With the breakdown of traditional controls after 1640, antinomian doctrines easily fused with the radical

⁸³ Leo Solt, *Saints in Arms. Puritanism and Democracy in Cromwell’s Army*, 1959, pp. 28. See also pp. 44-45.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37, 40-41.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39, 101.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁸⁹ Christopher Hill, *Liberty Against the Law. Some Seventeenth-Century Controversies*, 1996, p. 220.

tradition, which certainly goes back to sixteenth-century Familists and perhaps to fifteenth-century Lollards.⁹⁰

The Antinomians are Hill's revolutionaries, then, but he too is left to explain how their intended revolution failed to come about.⁹¹

The same flaws that weaken Huehns work appear in Hill's. He also is much too trusting of sources such as Edwards and Baxter, citing them without question or explication.⁹² In fact, he embraces almost any source that supports his own interpretation of revolutionary England. As J. H. Hexter astutely observes, Hill selects only that evidence which supports his case, with the effect that he "can be sure of arriving at any conclusion he aims at".⁹³ He simply repeats the analysis of contemporaries, rather than questioning why they chose to construct it. And, given the wealth of source material, it is inevitable that Hill will discover what he seeks to find: a radical movement of Antinomianism within the English Revolution.

Hill's argument is also flawed, in two ways. First, he follows Huehns in explaining the mystifying absence of radical, political Antinomian action.

When liberty of conscience was affected, the antinomian impulse led men to associate with other groupings to achieve political ends. But in general antinomianism was a dissolvent rather than a positive political creed. There never was a sect of antinomianism. Their doctrine imposed no external constraints on the way in which they should act; they had no predetermined or planned political programme... . Popular antinomianism was permanent revolution reduced to the absurd: no accepted sanctions, no known authorities, no limits: and yet no agreement among the permanent revolutionaries.⁹⁴

There was certainly no radical Antinomian sect, perhaps because there were no radical Antinomians at all!

⁹⁰ Christopher Hill, "Antinomianism in 17th-century England", in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill. Volume Two. Religion and Politics in 17th Century England*, Brighton, 1986, p. 162.

⁹¹ See Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, 1977, pp. 268-278, but especially p. 270.

⁹² For instance, see Hill, *Liberty Against the Law*, p. 215, n. 2.

⁹³ J. H. Hexter, "The Historical Method of Christopher Hill", in *On Historians. Reappraisals of some of the makers of modern history*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 243.

⁹⁴ Hill, "Antinomianism in 17th-century England", pp. 175, 178.

The second weakness of Hill's argument is its Marxist presuppositions. He is determined to find within England's capitalist, bourgeois revolution a failed revolution of true, lower-class radicals, betrayed by their conservative leaders.⁹⁵ This interpretation has been tottering for years, and Alastair MacLachlan has finally demolished it. His work charts the progress (and decline) of Hill and his fellow Marxist historians, he explores the contradictions that caused their arguments to fall apart,⁹⁶ and he labels their revolutionary model a "fabrication" of history.⁹⁷ The English Revolution, in Marxist terms, has had its day, then, but no one has yet considered what to do with its failed revolutionaries, the Antinomians.

J. C. Davis throws valuable light on the muddled historiography of revolutionary England. To begin with, the "perennial problem of the historiography of mid-seventeenth-century English radicalism has been that it - the radicalism - failed".⁹⁸ Indeed it did, and how the historian accounts for that failure is all important. The essential thing is definition, since "radical" is a relative term. Davis departs from previous historiography by questioning, "Should we talk about 'radicals' at all?"⁹⁹ He suggests there are three "minimal functions" which a movement must fulfil before it can be considered radical. "It must delegitimize the existing order however it is perceived. Second, it must legitimate a new order replacing it, and, thirdly, it must show you how to get from one to the other, it must incorporate a transfer mechanism".¹⁰⁰ By this definition both Huehns and Hill would have to concede that Antinomianism was not

⁹⁵ Christopher Hill, *Some Intellectual Consequences of the English Revolution*, Madison, 1980, p. 68.

⁹⁶ MacLachlan, *Rise and Fall*, p. 121.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, title page. This accusation is implicit, rather than explicit, in the text.

⁹⁸ J. C. Davis, "Radicalism in a Traditional Society: The Evaluation of Radical Thought in the English Commonwealth 1649-1660", *History of Political Thought*, 3 (1982), p. 193.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

radical; if nothing else it certainly lacked a transfer mechanism, it failed to provide a constructive way forward. It is useful, in fact, to question not just whether Antinomianism was radical, but also to ponder whether it was conservative. The real reason behind the Antinomians' failure to achieve a revolution may well be that they never intended to provoke one.

Building on this constructive scepticism, Davis's *Fear Myth and History* also provides important and innovative insights. In his book Davis essentially argues that the Ranters, a group of Antinomian pantheists and a prominent historiographical focus over recent decades, never existed. The group was merely "a projection reflecting contemporary anxieties and the desire for moral boundaries and conformity".¹⁰¹ They were the embodiment of those fears of an unsettled society which was sensationalised by the activities of the yellow press and then revived in the twentieth century by left-leaning historians (such as Christopher Hill) who needed the Ranters to lead the radical revolt within the bourgeois revolution.¹⁰² Thus, Davis concludes, "the Ranters were no more than a mythic projection, in the wake of which some hapless victims were swept up, labelled and sectarianised".¹⁰³

In building his careful and compelling argument Davis relies on the work of Kai T. Erikson, who considers the sociology of deviance in seventeenth-century New England.¹⁰⁴ Erikson argues that communities communicate their moral boundaries by delineating deviant behaviour; to proscribe what is not acceptable is by implication to prescribe what is.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the need to re-establish these boundaries is more acute

¹⁰¹ Davis, *Fear, Myth and History*, p. 95.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁴ Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans. A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, New York, 1966.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.

after “a realignment of power within the group” or following “a period of unsettling historical change”.¹⁰⁶ So a community labels as deviant those practices or beliefs which appear to attack its own cherished values. Thus “any community which feels jeopardized by a particular form of behaviour will impose more severe sanctions against it and devote more time and energy to the task of rooting it out”.¹⁰⁷ The deviancy itself may not be new, but it may be exposed more intensively during “a rash of publicity, a moment of excitement or alarm, a feeling that something needs to be done. It may or may not mean an actual increase in the volume of deviation”.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the community will necessarily find what it fears; people “who fear [Antinomians] will soon find themselves surrounded by them”.¹⁰⁹

In addition, Erikson offers one more vital insight: what a society feels threatened by may, paradoxically, be very close to what it holds dear. The community and the deviant come from opposite directions, but they target exactly the same values. This introduces considerable similarity between them. Very often the resulting deviancy, real or imagined, is the inverse or mirror image of what that society feels compelled to protect.¹¹⁰ For this reason, for example, it now

takes a keen eye to see where the Puritans drew the line between orthodoxy and some more serious forms of heresy... . Thus variations in action and attitude which mean ‘worlds of difference’ at one time in history may seem like so many split hairs when exposed to the hard light of another.¹¹¹

The community and the deviant will unwittingly use “the same cultural vocabulary and [move] in the same cultural rhythms”. The members of the community are unaware of this, so “deviant behaviour seems to come out of nowhere, an uninvited, perverse thrust

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 70.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

at the very heart of the community".¹¹² Erikson sees the Antinomian controversy, the Quaker invasion and the witch craze in these terms, as three "crime waves" which helped the New England community cement its moral boundaries.

Davis applies these ideas to post-regicide England, which had certainly experienced "a realignment of power within the group" and "a period of unsettling historical change". Mid-seventeenth-century English society possessed "a great deal for groups and individuals to be anxious about and, as always, they sought to resolve those anxieties as and where they could".¹¹³ It is dangerous to suggest that any one period was more anxious than another, but in the two years after the regicide the English certainly had a lot to fear. More than just Charles I's execution, they had recently witnessed the apparent demise of the ancient constitution, the abolition of the House of Lords and the removal of bishops, which "could be seen as a step in the unravelling of hierarchy" and even patriarchy. England in 1649-1651, then, was beset by numerous unsettling questions which had yet to be answered.¹¹⁴ The Ranter myth, Davis contends, gave expression to these collective fears of an unsettled society, and helped it to resecure its moral boundaries.

Not everyone agrees with Davis. His critics complain that his definition is too rigorous and exclusive,¹¹⁵ and that he uses sources (and historians) selectively.¹¹⁶ Even if

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹³ Davis, *Fear, Myth and History*, p. 99.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹¹⁵ Iain Hampsher-Monk, "[Review of] J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and The Historians*", *History of Political Thought*, 8 (1987), p. 573; Christopher Hill, "The Lost Ranters? A critique of J. C. Davis", *History Workshop*, 24 (1987), p. 134.

¹¹⁶ For example, see G. E. Aylmer, "Review Article. Did the Ranters Exist?", *P&P*, 117 (1987), p. 211; Jerome Friedman, "[Review of] *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and Their History, 1649-1984* [sic.]", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 19 (1988), p. 116; Barry Reay, "The World Turned Upside Down: A Retrospect", in Geoff Eley and William Huns (eds), *Reviving the English Revolution. Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill*, 1988, p. 68; J. F. McGregor, Bernard Capp, Nigel Smith, and B. J. Gibbons, "Debate. Fear Myth and Furore: Reappraising the 'Ranters'", *P&P*, 140 (1993), pp. 157, 161, 164.

the Ranters never existed they are not, as Davis believes, necessary to Christopher Hill's argument anyway.¹¹⁷ Several believe that Davis underestimates the silences of history - a lack of evidence need not necessarily signify a lack of existence - and so he cannot actually prove that no Ranter existed;¹¹⁸ after all, their contemporaries said they did.¹¹⁹ Edward Thompson calls the book "silly and unnecessary",¹²⁰ while Nigel Smith believes it is only "half a book" which offers no positive contribution and which will prove in the end to be merely "a distraction".¹²¹

Some of these criticisms are much less valid than others, and Davis' argument survives pretty well. To invert G. E. Aylmer's conclusion, "the burden of probability lies somewhere in between", but much nearer to Davis than to his critics.¹²² To begin with, Christopher Hill's response - "[i]f contemporaries called a man a Ranter, how can a historian say they were wrong?"¹²³ - suggests unexpected naïvety in an eminent historian, and tends to miss the point of Davis's analysis. It is characteristic of Hill's method to accept what a contemporary says, without ever questioning why the person was prompted to say it. Hill cannot see that a contemporary's description may reveal far more about the describer than the object described. Also, while it is true that the Ranters may not be necessary to Hill's interpretation of revolutionary England, it is surely dangerous to ignore the reality and effect of the phenomenon Davis has isolated. Its implications extend well beyond the Ranters. It is, though, possible that Davis has

¹¹⁷ Barry Reay, "[Review of] J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians*", *Political Science*, 40, 2 (1988), p. 98.

¹¹⁸ Reay, "A Retrospect", p. 68; Friedman, "[Review of] *Fear, Myth and History*", pp. 115-116; David Underdown, "[Review of] *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians*", *Journal of Modern History*, 61 (1989), p. 594.

¹¹⁹ Hill, "The Lost Ranters?", pp. 135, 137; Aylmer "Did the Ranters Exist?", p. 214.

¹²⁰ Edward Thompson, "On the Rant", in Geoff Eley and William Hunts (eds), *Reviving the English Revolution. Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill*, 1988, p. 155.

¹²¹ McGregor *et al.*, "Fear, Myth and Furore", p. 178.

¹²² Aylmer, "Did the Ranters Exist?", p. 219.

¹²³ Hill, "The Lost Ranters?", p. 135.

gone too far; there may have been a kernel of truth to the Ranter myth, and his definition may be too exclusive. But this does nothing to undermine the general thrust of his argument, that in their anxiety English people vastly overreacted to the Ranter presence. Moreover, the silences of history are irrelevant. They prove nothing conclusively and, if anything, they confirm Davis's side of the argument. And as for being a "distraction", ten years on the warnings Davis issued have largely been vindicated.¹²⁴

It is significant that throughout the debate no one questioned the assumptions that Erikson lays out, nor Davis' discussion of them in the Interregnum period. The closest his critics come is to deny the reality of a moral panic.¹²⁵ Yet even if Interregnum England's fears did not quite reach that pitch of intensity - and that is open to debate - still the Ranters could have served a useful purpose by establishing the moral boundaries in this unsettled post-regicide world.

These are important ideas. Of course, Baxter's Antinomianism was a much broader target than just the Ranters, and his already-established fears of Antinomianism simply made him easier prey to the Ranter myth, yet the connections are suggestive. Baxter's fears were manifested in much the same years, and it is possible that the Antinomians served for him a function similar to that which the Ranters performed for England. Moreover, the analysis of Erikson and Davis is useful because it avoids the weaknesses in Huehns and Hill. They are prepared to be sceptical of the sources, and they offer the novel suggestion that Antinomianism reveals more about the perceptions of its opponents than it does of the reality of religion in England at the time. Given the

¹²⁴ See especially, MacLachlan, *Rise and Fall*. Curiously, MacLachlan does not mention Davis's work, even while reaffirming many of his conclusions.

¹²⁵ Aylmer, "Did the Ranters Exist?", pp. 213, 215; McGregor *et al.*, "Fear, Myth and Furore", p. 160.

limited range of material that has been written about Antinomianism, the ideas of Erikson and Davis are certainly worth pursuing.

And the historical approach is by far the best means with which to do it. The sympathetic approach refuses to accept that Baxter may have been incorrect in his perceptions, and sidetracked by his idiosyncrasies. The theological approach ignores Baxter's context, and treats the timing of his publications as irrelevant, so it is ill-equipped to link Baxter's expressions about Antinomianism with the post-regicide context in which most of them appeared. The historical approach, however, is ideally suited to shape the investigation. It is sensitive to changes in Baxter's perceptions, it explores a wider range of sources so these shifts can be tracked with greater accuracy, and it always keeps one eye on the context in which Baxter was writing. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is in large part to apply the analysis of Erikson and Davis to Baxter, by means of the historical approach, to see if that makes sense of his antagonism to Antinomianism.

Richard Baxter and Antinomianism

Before such a task can be begun, however, a final, brief comment is required on the small amount of historiography that has brought Richard Baxter and Antinomianism together. Although its historiographical contribution has been negligible, Baxter's abiding hatred of Antinomianism was much too obvious and important a feature of his thought to be completely ignored by those who set about to study him. Indeed, his opposition to this doctrine makes frequent, though usually brief, appearances in his historiography. C. F. Allison, for example, notes that Baxter "began his work on

justification...to counteract antinomianism".¹²⁶ Likewise, Dewey Wallace recognises Baxter's perennial fear of Antinomianism.¹²⁷ "This one issue gave Baxter no rest", writes Alan C. Clifford.¹²⁸ Ely Bates would agree, seeing Baxter as "a most strenuous and successful opposer of Antinomian error".¹²⁹ And J. I. Packer, one final example, vividly describes Antinomianism as "the midwife which finally brought Baxter's system to birth", and as Baxter's "*bete noire* for whose slaughter his theology had originally been evolved".¹³⁰

Packer's insight is a useful one. First, Antinomianism was an object of Baxter's deepest fears and dislikes. Second, it exerted a profound influence on his theology, which was constructed against it. The question remains, however, as to the shape and extent of that influence. William Lamont makes a link between Baxter's shocked introduction to Antinomianism in the mid-1640s and his "rediscovery of Arminianism in 1649 as a tenable Protestant doctrine".¹³¹ Elsewhere, however, Lamont suggests it is "simplistic" to argue that Antinomianism drove Baxter "fatally into the arms of the Arminians".¹³² He is even cautious about whether Baxter ever really became detached from his Calvinist roots.¹³³

¹²⁶ C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism. The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter*, New York, 1966, p. 163.

¹²⁷ Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination. Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695*, Chapel Hill, 1982, p. 186.

¹²⁸ Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, p. 25.

¹²⁹ Bates, *Some Observations*, p. xxxiii.

¹³⁰ J. I. Packer, "Redemption and Restoration", p. 227; "Richard Baxter (1615-1691)", *Theology*, 56 (1953), p. 175.

¹³¹ William Lamont, "Comment. The Rise of Arminianism Reconsidered", *P&P*, 107 (1985), pp. 229, 230.

¹³² William Lamont, "Richard Baxter, the Apocalypse and the Mad Major", *P&P*, 55 (1972), pp. 88-89.

¹³³ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 129.

N. H. Keeble shares Lamont's caution, pointing only to a "modification" of Baxter's Calvinism "to meet the immediate moral danger of antinomianism".¹³⁴ Keeble notes that Baxter's "dread of the antinomian tendencies latent in Calvinism, and his intense pastoral and evangelical concern, led him to lay far more stress upon man's role in the scheme of salvation than is usually thought to be compatible with Calvinism".¹³⁵ Packer also suggests that after contact with Antinomianism, Baxter "retreated to the mediating Calvinism of Cameron, Amyraldus and the Saumur school".¹³⁶

On the other hand, Margaret Sampson, for example, is much less cautious. "Baxter's own retreat from Protestant soteriology", no less, "and shift towards moralism had awaited his direct experience of antinomianism in the Parliamentary army".¹³⁷ Her comments require some qualification, but they demonstrate that while Antinomianism has rightly been regarded as a powerful catalyst in Baxter's soteriological development, no one has ever established the nature and extent of that influence.

Other aspects of the impact of Antinomianism also remain open questions. For example, at what times was Baxter possessed with Antinomian concern? William Lamont believes that Antinomianism was Baxter's "prime target" from 1649 until his death in 1691.¹³⁸ N. H. Keeble, J. I. Packer, Iain Murray and Roger Thomas all agree.¹³⁹ Others take a more subtle view of Baxter's opposition, not questioning his continuing antagonism, just the active nature of it. Stewart Mechie, for example, sees three periods

¹³⁴ N. H. Keeble, "Richard Baxter's Preaching Ministry: its History and Texts", *JEH*, 35 (1984), p. 540.

¹³⁵ Keeble (ed.), *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter*, 1974, p. xviii.

¹³⁶ Packer, "Redemption and Restoration", p. (c).

¹³⁷ Margaret Sampson, "Laxity and liberty in seventeenth-century English political thought", in Edmund Leites (ed.), *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 108.

¹³⁸ Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, p. 188.

¹³⁹ Keeble, "C. S. Lewis, Richard Baxter and 'Mere Christianity'", *Christianity and Literature*, 30 (1981), p. 37; Packer, "Redemption and Restoration", p. 405; Ian Murray, "Richard Baxter - the Reluctant Puritan?", in *Advancing in Adversity. Papers read at the 1991 Westminster Conference*, Thornton Heath, Surrey, 1991, pp. 8, 15; Roger Thomas, "The Break-Up of Nonconformity", in Geoffrey F. Nuttall et al., *The Beginnings of Nonconformity*, 1964, p. 40.

in which Baxter was actively engaged against Antinomianism: the 1640s-50s, the 1670s and the early 1690s.¹⁴⁰ So too does F. J. Powicke, who provides the most penetrating glimpse into the trends of Baxter's anti-Antinomianism. Powicke sets out the late 1640s and 1650s as the first phase of Baxter's opposition, followed by a period of peace until the mid-1670s. Thereafter the issue continued to smoulder, sporadically bursting into flame, so that Baxter "was never quite free from the fear of it. Antinomianism was a spectre which haunted his thoughts to the end. And his last experience of it [in the early 1690s] distressed him as much as any he had known".¹⁴¹

Thus, important questions remain. What influence did Antinomianism have on Baxter's soteriology? How constant were his fears and active opposition? If his concern ebbed and flowed over time, what influence did that have on his thought and writings? Did that influence always act in the same way, and did his antagonism to Antinomianism always perform the same function? And why did it horrify him in the first place? C. F. Allison's implicit query deserves an answer. The Antinomians, he observes, "do not seem to have been especially shocking, and it is difficult to see why they aroused so much concern".¹⁴² Why indeed? If Baxter was "a little too apt to see antinomianism where no antinomianism was",¹⁴³ and if Antinomianism was "a *bete noir* which Baxter thought he saw round every corner",¹⁴⁴ what was it that he believed he was seeing, and why was he compelled so vigorously to respond?

To sum up, then, this thesis has three important goals. First, it seeks to extend the gains of the historical approach to Baxter that has been progressively pioneered by

¹⁴⁰ Stewart Mechie, "The Theological Climate in Early Eighteenth Century Scotland", in Duncan Shaw (ed.), *Reformation and Revolution*, Edinburgh, 1967, p. 260.

¹⁴¹ Powicke, *Life of Baxter*, pp. 242-245.

¹⁴² Allison, *Rise of Moralism*, p. 172.

¹⁴³ Mechie, "Theological Climate", p. 259.

¹⁴⁴ Packer, "Redemption and Restoration", p. 235.

Powicke, Nuttall and Lamont. Second, it hopes to use that approach to assess the merit of the analysis of Davis and Erikson in its application to Baxter. Third, by marrying the historical approach to their analysis, this thesis intends to answer those many questions that remain about Richard Baxter and Antinomianism. Before this task can be begun, however, Antinomianism first needs to be defined in its original historical context. And this is a story that begins not in the seventeenth-century, not even in England, but in sixteenth-century continental Europe.

Chapter Two

THE ANTINOMIAN WORLD

Therefore if you consider Christ and what He has accomplished, there is no Law anymore. Coming at a predetermined time, He truly abolished the entire Law... . [T]he Law has been abolished.

Martin Luther (1535)

Why, then, should one wish to abolish the Law, which cannot be abolished?

Martin Luther (1539)¹

The mid-seventeenth-century Antinomian debate in England was not carried on in isolation, disconnected from any former precedents. Indeed, given the importance of the issues at stake (justification, faith and sanctification, to name a few) contributors were careful to couch their arguments in terms of a Protestant tradition - as they saw it - making regular appeals to such figures as Martin Luther and John Calvin. But this was not without its problems. Luther himself was “Antinomian” in so many of his (early) beliefs, yet (later) he wrote a book condemning Antinomianism. Calvin attacked the Libertines, quite a different group from the Antinomians, yet he was assumed to have the same target in mind. As a result, both men were misunderstood, Luther was made the patron of two opposite causes, and the Antinomians - who preached a style of doctrine most closely associated with that of the

¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*: Jaroslav Pelikan (trans.), *LW*, 26.349, *Against the Antinomians* (1539); Martin H. Bertram (trans.), *LW*, 47.113.

early Reformation, and with the least success - found themselves stranded on the margins of English Protestantism.

During the seventeenth century a confluence of forces swept Antinomianism to the edge of English religion: their convictions were diverging from prevailing opinion; a spreading moralism within Calvinism viewed their beliefs with growing disapproval; they were caught in the cross-currents of denominational rivalry; and a mid-century crisis of authority overlaid Antinomianism with unnecessarily radical and frightening implications. In the end important tributaries were forgotten, earlier convictions were channelled away, and Antinomianism settled in the shallows as the powerful forces of mainstream religion passed it by.

The Sixteenth Century²

In 1654 William Eyre, curate of St Thomas's, Salisbury, denied that his doctrine had anything to do with the Antinomianism and Libertinism of the previous century. It was ludicrous, he wrote indignantly, to derive

the descent of [my] Doctrine from the *Antinomians*, who were a sect of *Libertines*, or carnal *Gospellers*, which appeared in *Germany* soon after the Reformation began, about the year 1538. The Ring-leader whereof was [John] *Agricola*...; they merited the name of *Antinomians* by their loose Opinions, and looser Practices, against whom *Luther* wrote several Books, and *Calvin* bitterly inveighed...who (as I shall shew anon) are no Enemies to the Doctrine I here maintain.³

Eyre's defence is revealing in several important ways. First, it demonstrates an acute awareness of the original context of the word, Antinomian. Second, it confuses the Antinomians and the Libertines (and their condemnation by Luther and Calvin

² I am grateful to Dr Thomas Fudge for his generous advice and direction during the research for this section.

³ William Eyre, *Vindiciae Justificationis Gratuitae. Justification without Conditions; Or The Free Justification of a Sinner, Explained, Confirmed and Vindicated*, 1654, p. 20. In the same year John Crandon made a similar defence in *Mr Baxters Aphorisms Exorized And Anthorized. Or, An Examination of and Answer to a Book written by Mr. Ri: Baxter*, 1654, p. 277.

respectively) showing that the two were understood to be synonymous in contemporary debate. Third, Eyre was determined to prove two things: that his doctrine was separate from that of the original Antinomians, which issued in practical licentiousness; and that Luther and Calvin, obviously two important authorities, would have approved of his theology. Finally, Eyre's defence exposed the nature of the attack. Clearly his critics were lumping his doctrine in with that of the Antinomians and the Libertines. Some of Eyre's perceptions were mistaken, but they were not unique, and these widespread misconceptions had an enormous effect on contemporary Antinomian debate. It is important to grasp the implications of this, but they can only be clarified by exploring what Luther and Calvin actually said in their historical context.

Antinomian controversy, in either century, was always likely to stir the passions. Antinomianism concerned itself with only one question, but bound up in its answer was an explosive range of potent issues. The all-important question, for the saint still afflicted with his fallen human nature, was this: "How can I be holy when I have sin and am aware of it?"⁴ Thus Antinomianism was a Christian soteriological understanding that scrutinised what actually occurred at the point of conversion, and it focused its attention on the interface between justification and sanctification. In particular, it grappled with the place of the moral law - dispensed by God through Moses - in each of these spheres. It considered the relationship between faith and works in the process of justification, weighing up the part the believer had to play within it. On one level, then, this question was intensely soteriological, yet once it connected with the importance of obedience and duty in the Christian's daily life, it released a host of (frightening) possibilities which were social and political as much as theological.

⁴ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*: LW, 26.233.

Once the plaster of Roman Catholic unity on these issues had been stripped away by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation - in which soteriology was of central importance - this question was invested with urgency and significance. And once Rome's monopoly on doctrinal interpretation had been removed, it was possible for a host of differing opinions to emerge. Thereafter the tensions between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, however they were defined, became ever more strained. "Antinomian" was first coined in this context, by Martin Luther,⁵ yet aspects of Luther's own soteriology might well be described as Antinomian.

In particular, Luther laid a breathtaking emphasis on the passivity of the believer in the process of justification. The law could neither help sinful people to attain the standard of righteousness it set out, nor could they help themselves.⁶ Their spiritual faculties were corrupt and their free will now had "no capacity to do anything but sin and be damned".⁷ There was simply no way that such creatures could respond to God's grace in the process of justification, so salvation could never be the result of the individual's efforts. To prove his point Luther observed that salvation came to the Apostle Paul even while he was persecuting the church. This proved that

grace is given freely to those without merits and the most undeserving, and is not obtained by any efforts, endeavours or works, whether small or great, even of the best and most virtuous of men, though they seek and pursue righteousness with burning zeal... [G]race comes so freely that no thought of it, let alone any endeavour or striving after it, precedes its coming.⁸

Salvation was the result of God's "predestination", not a person's effort.⁹ It excluded any preparation for grace.¹⁰ Luther's conclusion was emphatic; "Why, do we then

⁵ J. MacBride Sterrett, "Antinomianism", in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Edinburgh, 1908, p. 582; Huehns, *Antinomianism*, p. 1; R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Oxford, 1979, p. 169, n. 3.

⁶ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525): Philip S. Watson (trans.), *LW*, 33.262.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.272.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.276-277.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.272.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.263.

nothing? Do we work nothing for the obtaining of this righteousness? I answer, Nothing at all".¹¹

Salvation, then, had nothing to do with the individual's endeavours and everything to do with Christ's. "God has taken my salvation out of my hands into his", Luther wrote, "making it depend on his choice and not mine".¹² Christ took the initiative.¹³ The believer had no righteousness of his own to contribute, so the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him.¹⁴ In salvation "Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness"; and Christians now possessed "the same righteousness" as Christ, an "infinite righteousness".¹⁵ This was "an alien righteousness, instilled in us without our works by grace alone".¹⁶ Significantly, this unearned, passive, imputed righteousness was "clean contrary to...the righteousness of God's law".¹⁷ "Therefore", Luther enthusiastically declared in 1535, "if you consider Christ and what He has accomplished, there is no Law anymore. Coming at a predetermined time, He truly abolished the entire Law".¹⁸ The Christian, he concluded, should "live before God as if there were no law".¹⁹

"How can I be holy", Luther wondered, "when I have sin and am aware of it?"²⁰

He had laboured to show that the believer certainly was holy, with nothing less than the righteousness of Christ, but he did not ignore the second half of the question. He could

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (1535): in John Prince Fallows (ed.), *Commentary on Galatians by Martin Luther*, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. xv. Dating this commentary is no easy task, since Luther published at least five versions, but "[m]ost often it is the *Galatians* published in 1535 that is referred to by this title", Jaroslav Pelikan, "Introduction to Volume 27": *LW*, 27.ix.

¹² Luther, *Bondage of the Will*: *LW*, 33.289.

¹³ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*: *LW*, 26.275.

¹⁴ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. xiii.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1519): Lowell J. Satre (trans.), *LW*, 31.298.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.299.

¹⁷ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. xii.

¹⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*: *LW*, 26.349.

¹⁹ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. xiii. This was especially true on the matter of assurance. See, Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*: *LW*, 26.349 and *Commentary on Galatians*, p. xiii.

²⁰ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*: *LW*, 26.233.

never escape the reality that the believer who had received the righteousness of Christ also continued to live in sin. Thus he had to find some way of reconciling, or balancing, those two contrasting realities. His solution was simply to accept a paradox: “a Christian man is righteous and a sinner at the same time, holy and profane, an enemy of God and a child of God”.²¹ Moreover, the law had been abolished, and yet it had not. On the very same page that Luther declared “there is no Law anymore”, he also advised that “as long as the flesh remains, there remains the Law”.²² The law might relate to the “old man” and the promise to the new, but both the old and the new battled within the Christian.²³ Thus the law could not be dispensed with so easily. Likewise, the Christian’s imputed righteousness was “one that swallows up all sins in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ”. Yet it was also true, Luther wrote just one page later, that this “alien righteousness is not instilled all at once, but it begins, makes progress, and is finally perfected at the end through death”.²⁴ Until then, sins remained.

Luther possessed a rare willingness to accept paradox without making some forced or artificial effort at reconciliation, and without elevating one side of the equation at the expense of the other, but few others could match his achievement. As Luther’s views became more prominent, elements of his carefully balanced soteriology were taken out of proportion and out of context.²⁵ Some claimed that the law really was entirely abolished. They were, of course, the Antinomians.

John Agricola started it. He was a good friend, a former pupil and a loyal follower of Luther; during the early 1520s he even acted as Luther’s secretary.²⁶ In

²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.232. His Latin phrase was “*simul iustus et peccator*”.

²² *Ibid.*, 26.349.

²³ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. xiv, *Lectures on Galatians: LW*, 26.349.

²⁴ Luther, *Two Kinds of Righteousness: LW*, 31.298, 299.

²⁵ Huehns, *Antinomianism*, pp. 31, 33.

²⁶ James MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, vol. 4, 1930, p. 161; Martin Brecht (trans. James L. Schaaf), *Martin Luther. The Preservation of the Church. 1532-1546*, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 156.

1527 he took exception to the emphasis which Philip Melanchthon, a friend of both Luther and Agricola, was laying on the importance of the law in justification.²⁷ Agricola feared a return to the Roman Catholic-style allegiance to good works in salvation.²⁸ In response he laid a heavy emphasis on grace so that by September 1528 at least Luther was worried that Agricola was “starting to affirm and fight for a new doctrine, namely, that faith can exist without good works”.²⁹ A compromise was achieved, but debate broke out again in January 1537 when Agricola, now living in Wittenberg, assumed Luther’s teaching and preaching responsibilities during a brief absence.³⁰ At issue was the role of the law in justification, preaching, repentance and assurance.³¹ The two years that followed were filled with various efforts at resolution in which an angry Luther made no concessions.³² In 1539 he wrote a short, hostile piece, *Against the Antinomians*, which was supposed to have functioned as Agricola’s retraction.³³ Agricola complained of such rough treatment, to no avail, and in 1540 he left for Berlin.³⁴ Thereafter the debate largely dissipated without ever being satisfactorily resolved, and these former friends were never reconciled.³⁵

“Antinomian” literally means “against the law”, and that is precisely how Luther used the word. His central objection to Agricola and the Antinomians was their denial that the law should be preached to sinners. These “foolish and blind antinomians”, he

²⁷ For Melanchthon’s views, and their similarity to Luther’s, see Bernard J. Verkamp, “The Limits Upon Adiaphoristic Freedom: Luther and Melanchthon”, *Theological Studies*, 36 (1975), pp. 54-55, 57-58. Melanchthon later tried, unsuccessfully, to help reconcile Luther and Agricola. See Brecht, *Preservation of the Church*, pp. 169-170.

²⁸ Wengert, “Antinomianism”, p. 51; Sterrett, “Antinomianism”, p. 582.

²⁹ Martin Luther to John Agricola, September 11, 1528: *LW*, 49.212

³⁰ Brecht, *Preservation of the Church*, p. 158.

³¹ Wengert, “Antinomianism”, p. 52; Brecht, *Preservation of the Church*, p. 159; MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, p. 163.

³² Brecht, *Preservation of the Church*, p. 169.

³³ Luther, *Against the Antinomians*: *LW*, 47.107-119. See H. G. Haile, *Luther. An Experiment in Biography*, New York, 1980, p. 231.

³⁴ Brecht, *Preservation of the Church*, pp. 167-168.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

fumed, “do away with the preaching of God’s wrath in the church”; they “remove the Law from the church, as if everybody in the church were actually a saint”; and they “cast the Law out of the church and want to teach repentance by means of the Gospel [alone]”.³⁶ He was determined to stand against them.³⁷

It was soon obvious that he was worried not so much by the Antinomians’ theological position, as by its practical effect. This is a crucial distinction. While there were theoretical connections between his theology and theirs, he had no truck with their supposed ethics. Indeed, he detected in Antinomianism a whole raft of sinister implications. The Antinomians “foster smugness in their hearers” and they “flatter secure men”, he complained.³⁸ They dissuaded their hearers from fearing sin, effectively encouraging them to persist in it.³⁹ And very quickly Luther moved beyond their stated theology to put words in their mouths: “Listen! Though you are an adulterer, a whoremonger, a miser, or other kind of sinner, if you but believe, you are saved, and you need not fear the law. Christ has fulfilled it all”.⁴⁰ He added his own outrageous propositions to a series of supposedly Antinomian theses, just to show their logical consequences.⁴¹ Ultimately, he would have had his readers believe, Antinomianism subverted the gospel and Christian morality.⁴²

The hostility behind his overreaction⁴³ to the Antinomians is startling. It certainly surprised John Agricola, who felt that he was acting out of loyalty to Luther’s

³⁶ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*: George V. Schick (trans.), *LW*, 4.49, 243, 269.

³⁷ Martin Luther, *Table Talk* (Between November 1 and December 21, 1537): Theodore G. Tappert (trans.), *LW*, 54.248.

³⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*: *LW*, 3.314, *Table Talk* (September 12, 1538): *LW*, 54.309.

³⁹ Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*: Charles M. Jacobs (trans.), *LW*, 41.147, *Lectures on Genesis*: *LW*, 4.404.

⁴⁰ Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*: *LW*, 41.114.

⁴¹ Haile, *Experiment in Biography*, p. 229.

⁴² MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, p. 174.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-178.

own teaching.⁴⁴ Had Luther himself not argued that “the Law has been abolished”?⁴⁵ And though Luther scorned the Antinomians for teaching that “if you but believe, you are saved”, had he not himself claimed that “[i]f you believe, you are righteous”?⁴⁶ It is undeniable that “Luther himself had, on occasion, made statements...which, if taken literally, would have proved Antinomian enough in practice”.⁴⁷

The roots of Antinomianism, then, are found in the soteriology of Martin Luther. The hapless Agricola rightly “remembered Luther’s teachings as being full of comfort, stressing grace, and opposed to law”.⁴⁸ Luther’s reaction mystified him, understandably, but it can be explained. To begin with, the fact that Agricola had employed elements of Luther’s own soteriology worked against him. It created in Luther an embarrassed sense of responsibility, even if those elements had been wrenched out of balance.⁴⁹ Moreover, in order to maintain his support among the German princes - especially after the German Peasants’ War of 1525, in which his religious ideals had been used to justify social upheaval - Luther needed to show that his doctrines were not subversive. Thus political constraints helped to shape his reaction to the Antinomians. Ultimately, though, the main cause of his fierce response was pastoral. The Antinomians were preaching the right message, but to the wrong audience.

It was true that in earlier years Luther had “made use of these words which the Antinomians now quote... . But the circumstances of that time were very different from those of the present day”. Then the consciences of the people were oppressed and anxious under the burdens of Roman Catholicism, and “there was no need to inculcate

⁴⁴ Haile, *Experiment in Biography*, p. 227.

⁴⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians: LW*, 26.349.

⁴⁶ Luther, *On the Councils and the Church: LW*, 41.114, *Lectures on Galatians: LW*, 26.349.

⁴⁷ MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, p. 178.

⁴⁸ Haile, *Experiment in Biography*, p. 224. See also, pp. 226, 227.

⁴⁹ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: LW*, 4.50, *Against the Antinomians: LW*, 47.108; MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, pp. 164, 169.

the Law"; they needed to hear only words of grace. But in these later years the people had become smug and secure, so when the Antinomians preached the message of grace they only confirmed sinners in their impenitency. "If you see the afflicted and contrite", Luther concluded, "preach Christ, preach grace as much as you can. But not to the secure, the slothful, the harlots, adulterers and blasphemers".⁵⁰

Thus Martin Luther's fight with the Antinomians was provoked by their perceived pastoral influence. It is unnecessary here to weigh up the accuracy of his interpretation, although, given his hyperbolic inclinations and the nature of the debate as it subsequently developed in seventeenth-century England, it is entirely plausible that he misunderstood his opponents. This is incidental. What is important is to appreciate the ironies and the paradoxes of Luther's dispute with Agricola. Without realising that there were, in a sense, two Luthers, the whole muddle of the seventeenth-century English Antinomian debate must remain a mystery. Luther is the important figure here, not the Antinomians.

The same is true of John Calvin's controversy with the Libertines, even though its relevance is not immediately obvious. In fact, there would be no good reason even to consider the two controversies together except that "Libertine" and "Antinomian" were later used interchangeably in seventeenth-century England. William Eyre certainly used them in this way. Thus John Calvin was also an important authority in subsequent debate, even if, historically, his Libertine disputations were almost completely irrelevant to it. Not to be confused with the Libertines of Geneva,⁵¹ the group Calvin attacked was a loosely-associated band of French pantheistic determinists led by a former priest,

⁵⁰ MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*; pp. 171-172. See also Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: LW*, 3.237, 241; 4.49, 50, *Against the Antinomians: LW*, 47.111. Luther made this point repeatedly.

⁵¹ Allan Verhey, "Calvin's Treatise 'Against the Libertines'", *Calvin Theological Journal*, 15 (1980), p. 191.

Quintin Thieffry.⁵² The movement began around 1525. In 1534 Calvin met its leader, and by 1545 he was sufficiently concerned by its spread to publish his condemnation of it in an impassioned tract, *Against the Libertines*.⁵³ In it Calvin distinguished within Libertinism two complementary characteristics: mysticism and immorality.

First, Calvin was scathing of their rampant mysticism. “Libertines”, he scorned, “do not know how to broach a subject without immediately using the word ‘Spirit’, and with difficulty they cannot sustain two sentences without repeating it”.⁵⁴ They believed in one divine spirit that existed in every creature, and which constituted everything.⁵⁵ They interpreted this to mean that they themselves were God, since they partook in this divine spirit, and that God acted through them and moved in them as if they were stones or blocks.⁵⁶ Moreover, after death the spirit simply returned to the divine essence from which it had come; so the Libertines denied any future resurrection, eternal life and judgement for the individual soul.⁵⁷ This emphasis on the spirit also enabled them to sidestep Scripture, which they repudiated.⁵⁸ Nothing mediated between them and the spirit.

The second aspect of Libertinism was its practical immorality. It taught that the believer was restored to his former innocence before the Fall in which he was free to follow his “appetite”; all moral distinctions were removed; no one was to judge the

⁵² Benjamin Wirt Farley (trans. and ed.), *John Calvin. Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines. Translation, Introduction and Notes*, Grand Rapids, 1982, p. 163. See also, Wulfert de Greef (trans. Lyle D. Bierma), *The Writings of John Calvin. An Introductory Guide*, Grand Rapids, 1989, pp. 169-171.

⁵³ Farley, *Treatises*, pp. 163-164.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, p. 226.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 230, 238.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 231, 239.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 195, 199, 292-293, 296, 304.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 198, 221-225, 262-263.

behaviour of another; and the voice of conscience was silenced.⁵⁹ Calvin compared the Libertines to first-century

evildoers who, under the name of Christianity, led simple folk into dissolute living, removing their consciences through flattery, in order that, without scruples, each might indulge his appetite, abusing Christian liberty in order to give free rein to every carnal license, and taking pleasure in introducing a confusion into the world that overturns all civil government, order and human decency.⁶⁰

Thus the Libertines had corrupted the gospel “in order to debauch themselves”.⁶¹

Subsequently, the label of Libertine became a byword for licentious living. Historians have questioned whether Calvin was fair on this point,⁶² but once again it is his perceptions and their use in seventeenth-century debate that are all important.

Martin Luther wrote *Against the Antinomians*; John Calvin wrote *Against the Libertines*. It is important to realise that the differences between Antinomianism and Libertinism were enormous, but, even so, undeniable similarities linked them together. Each debate occurred in the heady atmosphere of Reformation Europe; both treatises appeared within six years of each other.⁶³ Each error was linked to the teaching of its opponent: Luther accounted for his earlier teachings on the law, and Calvin was careful to define his own brand of determinism.⁶⁴ Both Antinomianism and Libertinism were said to produce immoral living, and both provoked hostile responses from their pastorally-minded critics. Libertinism also contained its own Antinomianism.⁶⁵ Clearly such free living and loose morals could hold no place for the law. In the end these similarities allowed Libertinism to jettison its mystical definition and come to imply the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 270, 264, 239, 241, 250.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209. See Farley, *Treatises*, p. 166.

⁶² See Farley, *Treatises*, p. 166; Verhey, “Calvin’s Treatise”, pp. 196-197.

⁶³ They were published in 1539 and 1545.

⁶⁴ Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, pp. 242-249.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194. Calvin believed that “the law no longer holds us in bondage, yet its doctrine still remains in effect for governing our lives”, pp. 272-273. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559): in Ford Lewis Battles (trans.), *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1960, II. vii. 13.

practical application of Antinomianism. The two concepts were diverse in their origins, but they were thrust together in the violent atmosphere of later soteriological debate.

The Seventeenth Century

Antinomian controversy flared up again in early Stuart England, and the issues had changed little since they were first aired by Martin Luther a century earlier. The central question remained the same, except that it was now posed by John Eaton, vicar of Wickham Market, Suffolk: “how wee can bee made in the sight of God purer and whiter than Snow; when, yet notwithstanding, the reliques of sinne doe alwayes cleave unto us?”⁶⁶ This question had been “agitated of late”, noted a measured Samuel Torshell in 1632.⁶⁷ One side called the other “*Antinomists*”, while the other levelled the charge of “*Legalist*” or “*Justiciary*”.⁶⁸ Just a year earlier a concerned Henry Burton, already an outspoken critic of the Arminians,⁶⁹ had warned ominously that “there is a new sprung-up opinion, which not onely in this City [London], but in some parts of the Country spreading like a Cancer, or gangrene, hath infected many... . They deny any use at all of the morall law”.⁷⁰ Interestingly, the Antinomian John Eaton had observed exactly the opposite. He offered his *magnum opus* on justification as “the Antidote and preservative against all sweet, poysonous doctrines of our works, and vain-glorious

⁶⁶ John Eaton, *The Honey-Combe Of Free Justification by Christ alone. Collected out of the meere Authorities of Scripture, and common and unanimous consent of the faithfull Interpreters and Dispensers of Gods Mysteries upon the same*, 1642, p. 33.

⁶⁷ Torshell was a Puritan rector at Bunbury in Cheshire, *DNB*, 19.998.

⁶⁸ Samuel Torshell, *The three Questions Of Free Justification. Christian Liberty. The Use of the Law*, 1632, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁹ *DNB*, 3.457-459.

⁷⁰ Henry Burton, *The Law And the Gospell reconciled. Or The Evangelicall Fayth, and the Morall Law how they stand together in the state of grace*, 1631, p. 3.

well-doings; this is the preservative against these infectious and contagious times”.⁷¹ And Robert Towne, a well-known Antinomian later brought to the attention of the Westminster Assembly,⁷² scorned the spreading poison that works must be added to faith.⁷³ Like competing physicians, each side detected and diagnosed a completely different disease.

Historians should not be deceived by such rhetoric; the extent of Antinomianism was probably small. T. D. Bozeman detects an Antinomian “movement” in which Eaton and others formed a “first wave”, but even he is forced to concede that - in print at least - it only involved five (perhaps six) Antinomian authors, who were rebutted in a mere four tracts.⁷⁴ This does little to suggest the existence of a strong and coherent movement. Bozeman’s argument is on much safer ground when he contends that Eaton and others were reacting against the strict Puritan way: “a grinding schedule of devotions, introspections, meditations, preparations for conversion, spiritual diaries, fastdays and other ‘spiritual exercises’”.⁷⁵ Only in the presence of this emerging moralism did the soteriological ideals of the Antinomians begin to seem distinctive.

As Burton had warned, the issue at stake was almost exclusively that of the moral law; the Antinomian label was, at least, appropriate. But the question of the law was actually rather limited. The Antinomians accepted that the law should be preached to sinners, and both sides agreed that it played no part in the justification of those sinners, but the Antinomians refused to grant it a role in their sanctification. “They

⁷¹ Eaton, *Honey-Combe*, To the Reader.

⁷² A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, Oxford, (reprinted) 1988, pp. 489-490.

⁷³ Robert Towne, *The Assertion Of Grace. Or, A Defence of the Doctrine of Free-Justification, against the...Antifidians*, 1644, p. 15.

⁷⁴ T. D. Bozeman, “The Glory of the ‘Third Time’: John Eaton as Contra-Puritan”, *JEH*, 47 (1996), pp. 640, 654. The five authors were John Eaton, John Traske, Roger Brierley, Robert Towne and Tobias Crisp. The possible sixth is anonymous.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 638-639.

allow the law no further use", Burton objected, "than as to bee a Schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, and then farewell law".⁷⁶ This was "the maine difference betweene us", he explained, and Samuel Torshell agreed, casting the problem in similar terms.⁷⁷ They were joined by William Hinde, another Puritan divine, who claimed - citing Luther - that the law "is of no force for our justification, but...it is of great use for edification and sanctification".⁷⁸

Yet it is not at all clear that this is what the Antinomians actually taught, and the confusion is not helped by their own ambiguity. For example, Robert Towne denied the law any place in sanctification,⁷⁹ while at the same time affirming "the use of the Morall Law to true beleevvers. For it keeps them close in spirit and conscience through faith unto Christs righteousness".⁸⁰ It was not the only place where he agreed that the law should be preached to believers,⁸¹ but his point was finely nuanced. "I wish that I be not mistaken, for I never deny the Law to be an eternall and inviolable Rule of Righteousness: but yet affirme that its the Grace of the Gospel which effectually and truely confirmeth us thereunto".⁸² Towne asserted that the law should be preached to believers because it set out the standard of righteousness, not forgetting that only the gospel of grace could ever bring the Christian to attain it. It was, perhaps, a subtlety that was lost on his opponents.

Likewise, John Traske, another of these "first wave" Antinomians, agreed that the moral law did not "at all availe us to justification: though for obedience it still

⁷⁶ Burton, *Law And the Gospell reconciled*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20; Torshell, *The three Questions*, p. 264.

⁷⁸ William Hinde, *The Office And Use Of The Morall Law of God in the dayes of the Gospell*, 1622, p. 32.

⁷⁹ Towne, *Assertion Of Grace*, pp. 5, 156.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

⁸¹ For example, see *ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

serveth to curbe our old man, and to quicken the new man".⁸³ That was more than even Luther had conceded. And John Eaton, "the very 'father' of English Antinomianism",⁸⁴ taught that the law was still to be preached.⁸⁵ Setting aside their apparent statements to the contrary, it is difficult to see what all the fuss was about, but more was at stake. The real danger lay in their soteriology, which enshrined a passivity for the believer in the process of salvation that was reminiscent of the young Martin Luther.

The question remained, how to reconcile the holiness of the saint and the sinfulness of his life. The Antinomians were determined to stay loyal to a transformation at conversion that rendered the believer totally holy. There were no half measures; a person was either completely holy or completely sinful.⁸⁶ But it was a difficult problem to resolve. John Eaton simply accepted the paradox that "God knowes the sin that dwels in his sanctified children, yet hee sees [it] abolished out of his own sight".⁸⁷ He used the example of a coloured glass to try and explain it.⁸⁸ Once a liquid was poured into the glass it appeared to lose its colour, and took on the colour of the glass itself. Likewise, when the sinner was poured into Christ - or, rather, when Christ's perfect righteousness was imputed to him⁸⁹ - he was no longer sinful in God's eyes, but holy. Sanctification was the process whereby the liquid (and here the analogy broke down) was actually changed, "little by little",⁹⁰ into the colour of the glass. So there was a one-off transformation of justification at conversion - on which everything rested,

⁸³ John Traske, *A Treatise Of Libertie From Judaisme, Or An Acknowledgement of true Christian Libertie*, 1620, p. 10.

⁸⁴ Huehns, *Antinomianism*, p. 47.

⁸⁵ Eaton, *Honey-Combe*, pp. 105, 483-484.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95. See also Towne's attempt to explain the tension between a believer's sainthood and sinfulness, where he argued that the believer might see his sin, but God did not. Towne, *Assertion Of Grace*, p. 97.

⁸⁸ Eaton, *Honey-Combe*, pp. 274-275.

⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 7, 22, 257, 272 for a description of this imputation.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 275, 476.

since it changed the “colour” of the believer in God’s sight - that was coupled with a slow change of sanctification, a tangible witness to this earlier, inner change.⁹¹ The Antinomians accepted a real, actual imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer, and a sanctification that flowed out of that radical change.⁹²

For the Antinomians, then, the believer’s part in justification was entirely passive - “wee doing nothing hereunto, and we working nothing, but only are meer patients suffering another *ab extra*, even God to work all in us”⁹³ - and this is what stoked the fears of their opponents. A tightening of the law’s sphere of influence might have been ignored, but this soteriology rang warning bells in worried minds. The “Question is very necessary, and yet dangerous”, Torshell warned, “Dangerous because carnall men doe wontonly abuse it”.⁹⁴ Burton believed it a “Libertine doctrine, which lets loose the raines to all licentiousnesse”.⁹⁵

This the Antinomians strenuously denied.⁹⁶ They repudiated the malicious aspersions of their opponents who had taken their words out of context and twisted their meaning.⁹⁷ They denied that they were “*libertine enthusiasts*”;⁹⁸ they claimed to despise the Antinomians - “Abrogators of the Law” - as much as anyone,⁹⁹ and they asserted that their doctrine alone was capable of protecting the Christian religion from all heresy and error.¹⁰⁰ With some justification they claimed that theirs was “the established Doctrine of our Church, which truly teacheth free Grace, Faith alone, onely

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 339, 483-484.

⁹² For example, see Towne, *Assertion Of Grace*, pp. 97, 153.

⁹³ Eaton, *Honey-Combe*, p. 274.

⁹⁴ Torshell, *The three Questions*, p. 48.

⁹⁵ Burton, *Law And the Gospell reconciled*, To the Reader.

⁹⁶ For example, see Towne, *Assertion Of Grace*, pp. 4, 25, 172; Traske, *Treatise Of Libertie*, p. 8.

⁹⁷ This was a fairly constant complaint. For instance, see Towne, *Assertion of Grace*, pp. 116, 148, 152-153, 156.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁰ Eaton, *Honey-Combe*, pp. 454-456, 485.

in Christ crucified, excluding and denying all works beforehand”.¹⁰¹ John Eaton made repeated appeals to the “faithful interpreters” of the past;¹⁰² and he cited Luther more than one hundred times.¹⁰³ The Antinomians proclaimed, in fact, that they were the preservers of “genuine Protestant doctrine”.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, so did their opponents. Burton questioned the Antinomians’ attachment to “fayth onely with out works”, and he felt compelled somehow to graft works into faith, but this did not stop him also from citing Luther in support.¹⁰⁵ William Hinde was certainly willing to claim Luther for himself.¹⁰⁶ The battle for Luther had begun.¹⁰⁷

It is not clear that these actors constituted a “first wave” of an Antinomian movement, but they were prominent in the years before the civil war, even if some of their texts were not published until censorship lapsed when that war began.¹⁰⁸ The same ideas would come into their own during the tumultuous years of the 1640s, and it would be unwise to sever them completely from this earlier debate, which reveals numerous connections with both earlier and later periods of contention. It demonstrates that each side of the divide could appeal to Luther with justification. Likewise, each side could claim to be preserving the seminal Protestant ideal of justification by faith alone, although the Antinomians came closest to it. Finally, it was (as usual) the practical and pastoral implications that were so frightening. Try as they might, the Antinomians could never convince their opponents that their doctrine would not result in licentious

¹⁰¹ Towne, *Assertion Of Grace*, p. 12.

¹⁰² For example, see Eaton, *Honey-Combe*, pp. 174, 333.

¹⁰³ Bozeman, “John Eaton as Contra-Puritan”, p. 644. Towne also cited Luther repeatedly, *Assertion Of Grace*, pp. 58-60, 67, 135, 150, 162, 166.

¹⁰⁴ Towne, *Assertion Of Grace*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Burton, *Law And the Gospell reconciled*, pp. 17, 33-34.

¹⁰⁶ Hinde, *Office And Use Of the Morall Law*, preface (“Luther...agreeth with mee”), pp. 10-12.

¹⁰⁷ See J. Wayne Baker, “*Sola Fide, Sola Gratia*: The Battle for Luther in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16 (1985), pp. 115-133. This is an excellent article.

¹⁰⁸ Bozeman, “John Eaton as Contra-Puritan”, p. 640.

living. It was this fear that gave so much energy to those critics. All of this would come into greater focus when the Antinomian dispute exploded in the 1640s, but in the meantime Antinomianism had raised its head in the distant, Puritan stronghold of New England.

Antinomian controversy gripped the New England colony from October 1636 through to March 1638.¹⁰⁹ A key player was Anne Hutchinson, wife of a London merchant, William Hutchinson, with whom she emigrated to New England in May 1634. By the spring of 1636 suspicions were raised about the orthodoxy of Anne's beliefs, and their links with the teaching of the Reverend John Cotton. She was accused of Antinomianism, and the debate began. Henry Vane, the governor of Massachusetts, and the Reverend John Wheelwright, a recent arrival to the colony, sided with Anne Hutchinson; John Winthrop, a dominant figure in early New England, and most of the colony's ministers did not. John Cotton was left uncomfortably in the middle. In November 1637 Wheelwright and his small band of supporters were disenfranchised and expelled from the colony. Anne Hutchinson herself, after a lengthy court hearing, was excommunicated and banished in March 1638. The controversy effectively ended with her departure; five years later she was killed by Indians.¹¹⁰

William K. B. Stoevers believes that "both Cotton and Hutchinson reveal marked affinity with the religious radicalism that found expression in [John] Eaton and [Tobias] Crisp" and John Traske.¹¹¹ He persistently suggests that they were all part of one movement, and that the New England Antinomians were closely linked with "the

¹⁰⁹ This brief outline of events draws upon the introduction to David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638. A Documentary History*, 2nd ed., Durham, NC, 1990, pp. 4-10.

¹¹⁰ The English later read about this affair in [Thomas Weld], *Short Story Of The Rise, reign and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists, & Libertines, that infected the Churches of New England*, 1644. Weld used the episode to discredit England's Antinomians.

¹¹¹ William K. B. Stoevers, 'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven'. *Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts*, Middletown, CT, 1978, p. 166.

substratum of popular English heresy”, “the radical edge of English nonconformity”, “a reservoir of popular heresy in Old England” and “a radical strain of English nonconformity”.¹¹² There is, however, no evidence that the English Antinomians themselves formed such a movement, nor that Anne Hutchinson or anyone else established a foreign consulate for it.¹¹³ Stoever focuses his attention almost exclusively on the much more limited issue of Christian assurance,¹¹⁴ yet this issue did not especially mark the English Antinomians with whom he draws his comparison.

David Hall offers a different interpretation. Like Stoever, Hall considers the theological aspect of the New England debate, but he is prepared to acknowledge that the whole controversy was “not about matters of doctrine but about power and freedom of conscience”. Ultimately, it

was a struggle for control of Massachusetts, and when control was assured the victors showed little mercy to the vanquished. In truth, the Antinomian Controversy is one of those events historians speak of as crises or turning points. Coming at a time when the new society was still taking shape, it had a decisive effect upon the future of New England.¹¹⁵

The theological issues, of such importance to Stoever, were mainly a means of communicating wider concerns.¹¹⁶

Kai T. Erikson could not agree more. New England, for its early settlers, was a “way”, not a place, and Antinomianism threatened that way at a time of transformation.¹¹⁷ The earlier individualism so characteristic of the Puritan ethic was giving way to the corporate necessities of governing a state in which Puritans were the

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 167, 168, 169.

¹¹³ Christopher Hill would disagree, “Antinomianism in 17th-century England”, pp. 164, 171.

¹¹⁴ Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*, p. 161. In addition, see William K. B. Stoever, “Nature, Grace and John Cotton: The Theological Dimension in the New England Antinomian Controversy”, *Church History*, 44 (1975), esp. pp. 24, 27-31.

¹¹⁵ Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, pp. 11, 3.

¹¹⁶ This recognition informs much recent analysis, James F. Cooper, “Anne Hutchinson and the ‘Lay Rebellion’ against the Clergy”, *New England Quarterly*, 61 (1988), pp. 381-382.

¹¹⁷ Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, p. 68.

rulers, not a battling minority.¹¹⁸ An “administrative machinery was slowly developing to make sure that each private conscience was rightly informed and loyal to the policies and programs of the state... . Sainthood in New England had become a political responsibility as well as a spiritual condition”.¹¹⁹ True, Anne Hutchinson refused to have her inner spirituality measured and vindicated by a clergy determined to use the outward works of sanctification as their guide.¹²⁰ Yet even here a social and political tension was being worked out in theological terms.

In its purest form, the covenant of grace was almost an invitation to anarchy, for it encouraged people to be guided by an inner sense of urgency rather than by an outer form of discipline... . No, the covenant of grace might make good material for a revolutionary slogan, but it was hardly the kind of doctrine a government could afford to tolerate in its undiluted form once that government came to power.¹²¹

Given this disguised reality “the affair had a shape and a logic which were not wholly reflected in the words that were spoken”.¹²² Moreover, Hutchinson’s opponents knew they were protecting something, but they were not yet sure what it was.¹²³ When Hutchinson was finally condemned she asked, “I desire to know, wherefore I am banished”. “Say no more”, Winthrop evaded, “the court knows wherefore and is satisfied”.¹²⁴ Erikson contends that, although Winthrop could not articulate it, by sending Anne Hutchinson away he was demonstrating who was welcome to remain. These New Englanders were re-securing and redefining their moral boundaries in a time of unsettled transformation.¹²⁵ Theology was important, but soteriological debate performed a social and political function.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 73.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 87.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 82.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 101.

¹²⁴ Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, p. 348.

¹²⁵ Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, pp. 101-102.

It is unlikely, then, that the New England Antinomians were part of a radical Antinomian movement in England. There were similarities, but not so much between the two groups of Antinomians, as between their opponents. In both New England and in England Antinomian doctrine provoked fears for authority and order, and in both cases the whole debate disguised wider political and social fears. These connections are especially evident in those who opposed English Antinomianism during the 1640s, when England underwent its own time of unsettled transformation.

That 1640s English Antinomian debate was provoked by the publication of key figures from the “first wave” of Antinomianism, and by the appearance in print of a small number of contemporary Antinomian authors. Three of them feature strongly in Richard Baxter’s experience of Antinomianism, and it is appropriate to consider them here. The least significant was William Dell, who was a chaplain in Parliament’s army, serving in the regiment of Thomas Fairfax. The second was John Saltmarsh, another army chaplain attached to Fairfax. Little is known of him before a fruitful writing career which began in 1639 and ended with his death in 1647.¹²⁶ Above all others, during the 1640s at least, Saltmarsh did most to provoke Baxter’s horror at Antinomianism. The last was Tobias Crisp, the son of a wealthy London merchant, an Arminian-turned-Puritan minister of Brinkworth, Wiltshire.¹²⁷ Despite being the first of these three to be published, Crisp did not feature in Baxter’s early anxiety. Soon, however, he came to dominate it. Crisp (who had died in 1643) displaced Saltmarsh as Baxter’s Antinomian bogeyman, and remained so until Baxter’s own death in 1691.

¹²⁶ See Leo Solt, “John Saltmarsh: New Model Army Chaplain”, *JEH*, 2 (1951), pp. 69-80.

¹²⁷ *DNB*, 5.99-100; Christopher Hill, “Dr Tobias Crisp, 1600-43”, in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill. Volume Two. Religion and Politics in 17th Century England*, Brighton, 1986, pp. 141-142.

These men preached a style of doctrine that matched that of Martin Luther a century earlier. They were the heirs of Luther, especially in emphasising the passivity of the believer in the process of justification. The “right reformation” which William Dell attempted to recover, for example, was a transformation of the soul so radical that no one “is able to *resist*”.¹²⁸ Christ brought faith with Him, and He did all the work of salvation.¹²⁹ At the cross the very righteousness of Christ was imputed to the believer, and his sins were imputed to Christ Who had, standing in the believer’s place, taken upon Himself the curse and punishment of the law.¹³⁰ As a result, and the example of the Apostle Paul proved it,¹³¹ salvation was freely available without preparation or prior condition.¹³² John Saltmarsh’s claim that these beliefs were held by “the *common Protestant*” should not be dismissed; each element of this soteriology had been endorsed by Luther.¹³³

These preachers drew out the practical implications of their soteriology in the areas of conversion and assurance. When discussing conversion they argued that there was no need for the sinner first to prepare himself for grace and salvation.¹³⁴ According to Saltmarsh there were no

conditions in the Gospel of faith, and repentance, &c. and certain legal preparations before Christ should be offered and brought to the soul... There needs no more on our side to work or

¹²⁸ William Dell, *Right Reformation: Or, The Reformation of the Church of the New Testament, Represented in Gospel-Light*, 1646, p. 8.

¹²⁹ Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted: Being the substance of Ten Sermons Preached by...Tobias Crisp*, 1690, p. 22, *Christ Alone Exalted In Fourteene Sermons*, 1643, p. 247.

¹³⁰ Dell, *Right Reformation*, p. 5; John Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace: Or, The Flowings Of Christs Blood freely to Sinners*, 1645, pp. 143, 176; Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted; In seventeene Sermons*, 1643, pp. 88-90, 91-92, *Fourteene Sermons*, p. 248.

¹³¹ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, pp. 102-103.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 153, 188, 194.

¹³³ John Saltmarsh, *Sparkles of Glory, Or, Some Beams of the Morning-Star*, 1647, p. 194. For Luther, see above, pp. 53-55. See also Huehns’ description of Antinomianism in seventeenth-century England, *Antinomianism*, ch. 3, and Hill’s, “Antinomianism in 17th-century England”. Note that Hill’s essay has received fair criticism in Richard L. Greaves, “Revolutionary Ideology in Stuart England: The Essays of Christopher Hill”, *Church History*, 56 (1987), pp. 96-98.

¹³⁴ See Saltmarsh’s response to his critic, Thomas Gataker, on this point in John Saltmarsh, *Reasons For Unitie, Peace, and Love, With An Answer...to a Book of Mr Gataker*, 1646, pp. 136-137. See also, *Free-Grace*, pp. 102-103.

warrant *Salvation* to us, but to be perswaded that *Jesus Christ died for us*, because *Christ hath suffered*, and *God is satisfied*... . The promises of *Christ* are held forth to sinners as sinners, not as repenting sinners or humble sinners, as any condition in us upon which we should challenge *Christ*: for then it is no more grace, but works.¹³⁵

He frequently condemned those pastors who kept the spiritual wound open, waiting for signs of sincerity, before they would ever offer the promises of the gospel.¹³⁶ Likewise, Tobias Crisp argued that this was putting the cart before the horse. “Beloved, you may pump at your own Hearts until you break them, before you can fetch up a drop of Grace (so dry are they) unless Christ himself be first poured in... . You must first get your Spirits keened by Christ”.¹³⁷

They also applied their views to the vexing question of assurance. Once again, passive belief was the key.¹³⁸ “We must *believe* more truth of our own *graces* than we can *see* or *feel*... . So as we are to believe our *repentance* true in him, who hath *repented* for us...[and] our *new obedience* true in *him*, who hath *obeyed* for us”.¹³⁹ They reassured the saints that their sins made no difference to their justification; sins neither brought punishment from God, nor did they alter their state of peace with Him.¹⁴⁰ Once again it was the old question; the believer was aware of his sin, but immutably sinless in the sight of God.¹⁴¹ Pastors who preached otherwise were “tearing and racking poor Souls, fighting and torturing their poor Consciences, about the matter of Justification”.¹⁴²

In setting this soteriological and pastoral agenda, however, the Antinomians (at least, this is what they were called) were battling the prevailing winds of mainstream English religion. By the 1640s their doctrine and its applications were unpopular, for

¹³⁵ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, pp. 188, 194, 104.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 25-29, 37.

¹³⁷ Crisp, *Ten Sermons*, p. 23. See also, pp. 98, 99.

¹³⁸ Crisp, *Fourteene Sermons*, p. 255; Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, pp. 76-77.

¹³⁹ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, pp. 84-85.

¹⁴⁰ Crisp, *Fourteene Sermons*, pp. 243, 244, 311; Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, pp. 80, 174-176.

¹⁴¹ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, p. 129.

¹⁴² Crisp, *Ten Sermons*, p. 102.

two reasons. First, their style of soteriology had become increasingly marginalised over the previous half-century. Initially, Calvinism had flavoured the Church of England's theological position.¹⁴³ Antinomianism owed its origins to Luther, but Calvinism - with its emphasis on the infallible and irresistible work of God in saving the elect - was at least amenable to an Antinomian style of doctrine. But during the 1620s and 1630s this Calvinism came increasingly under threat (especially at an official level) from an aggressive Arminianism,¹⁴⁴ which cultivated a place for free will in salvation, preparations for grace and a conditional covenant.¹⁴⁵ "By the beginning of the seventeenth century the dominant mode of religious thought in England was Calvinist", explains Christopher Hill. "By the end of the century high Calvinism had lost its intellectual appeal. Bishops and many dissenters alike preached a theology of works". The older predestinarian theology had simply "disintegrated".¹⁴⁶ And if Calvinism was marginalised, so too was Antinomianism.

Not only that, those to whom Antinomianism may have remained palatable - the Calvinists - were erecting barriers of their own around the untrammelled dispensation of God's grace in salvation. Like the convictions of the Antinomians, their views on grace can be detected in the areas of conversion and assurance. When they discussed conversion, they no longer accepted the passivity of the believer in justification. R. T. Kendall explains how Calvin's conception of faith - which simply looked to Christ -

¹⁴³ Nicholas Tyacke, "Anglican Attitudes: Some Recent Writings on English Religious History, from the Reformation to the Civil War", *JBS*, 35 (1996), pp. 141-144; Patrick Collinson, "England and International Calvinism 1558-1640", in Menna Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism 1541-1715*, Oxford, 1986, pp. 198-199; Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, pp. 3-4; P. G. Lake, "Calvinism and the English Church 1570-1635", *P&P*, 114 (1987), esp. pp. 32-38.

¹⁴⁴ See Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640*, Oxford, 1987. Tyacke's thesis has been hotly contested by Peter White in his *Predestination, policy and polemic. Conflict and consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War*, Cambridge, 1992.

¹⁴⁵ Tyacke, "Anglican Attitudes", p. 152.

¹⁴⁶ Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, p. 268.

mutated through the writings of such influential Calvinist writers as Theodore Beza, William Perkins and the Westminster divines who made faith a matter of the will. Previously passive faith was transformed into an active decision, presupposing an inherent ability to make a choice, and Arminian-like voluntarism had slipped in through the back door.¹⁴⁷

Calvinists also separated assurance from faith in what Kendall calls “the experimental predestinarian tradition”. Here a believer “must *do* certain things and infer his assurance” from them.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, as Bozeman points out, the Antinomians found themselves reacting not only against the Arminians, but also against the harsh regime of moralistic Puritan piety that, to them, smacked so much of the doctrine of works.¹⁴⁹ Resisting this trend, they sustained the “experiential predestinarian” tradition, insisting “that assurance of salvation is to be had apart from experimental knowledge”.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, those soteriological convictions so precious to the Antinomians were, generally speaking, being undermined by both Arminians and Calvinists. A shift was under way, from grace to moralism. It began during the 1620s¹⁵¹ - when the convictions of the “first wave” Antinomians were first seen to be distinctive - it was complete by the end of the century, and in the process early Reformation ideals were abandoned. C. F. Allison and John Spurr link this development to a shift in theologians’ understanding of

¹⁴⁷ Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, pp. 2-4 (the main issues), 19-21 (Calvin’s view of “passive” faith), 36 (Beza), 64-66 (Perkins), 200-201 (Westminster divines). John Cotton resisted this trend and was labelled Antinomian, ch. 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 75.

¹⁴⁹ See Bozeman, “John Eaton as Contra-Puritan”, pp. 638-641, and Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, chs 13, 14.

¹⁵⁰ Kendall, *Calvinism and English Calvinism*, p. 169, n. 3.

¹⁵¹ Peter Lake, “‘A Charitable Christian Hatred’: The Godly and their Enemies in the 1630s”, in Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (eds), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, 1996, p. 173.

the formal cause of salvation, from Christ's imputed righteousness (argued by Luther) to the inherent righteousness of the believer.¹⁵² Similarly, Margaret Sampson observes that even "Puritans were themselves implicitly moving away from the central concerns of sixteenth-century Protestant doctrine towards a frank moralism... .as the best means of combating lay licentiousness".¹⁵³ In the process old-style Protestant theology came under threat. Isobel Rivers also isolates a shift "from what can loosely be called the religion of grace (the descendant of Reformation Protestantism...) to the religion of reason... . This shift involved by the end of the century the virtual eclipse of Calvinism".¹⁵⁴ The moorings of Antinomian-style theology remained where they were, but this subtle sea-change left its adherents washed up on the shores of English Protestantism. This transition set up a battle for Luther in the 1640s and beyond as both sides claimed him for their own, and as each contender sought to provide the distinctive soteriological definition of the Protestant religion. It was a battle the Antinomians would eventually lose.

The second reason why the Antinomians were so unpopular is simply the timing of their reappearance; the Civil War was the worst of all times for the Antinomians' attempt to restore classic Protestantism to mainstream English religion. Antinomianism appeared to threaten law and obedience; this was a frightening prospect at the best of times, but during the 1640s England experienced its most severe crisis of authority. Following the collapse of censorship in 1642, radical ideas - both religious and political

¹⁵² Allison, *Rise of Moralism*, pp. x, 9, 20, 178; John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689*, New Haven, 1991, pp. 301-302.

¹⁵³ Sampson, "Laxity and Liberty", pp. 106, 117.

¹⁵⁴ Isobel Rivers, "Grace, Holiness, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Bunyan and Restoration Latitudinarianism", in N. H. Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus. Tercentenary Essays*, Oxford, 1988, p. 45. See also, Isabel Rivers, *Reason Grace and Sentiment. A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780. Volume 1. Whichcote to Wesley*, Cambridge, 1991, p. 124.

- threatened to stand English society on its head.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile the civil war, to varying degrees, wreaked havoc across the country; it divided societies, displaced thousands and devastated the nation's economic, political, religious and social life.¹⁵⁶ The stable and the familiar seemed everywhere under threat. "For most people the desire for a recognizable form of order may well have dominated their hopes in the years after the [first civil] war ended in 1646".¹⁵⁷ The Clubmen rose up in the south of England, tired of the abuses of war (from both armies) and desperate for a return to former tranquillity.¹⁵⁸ In the confusion and disorder of the wars it was all too easy to imagine the breakdown of traditional government and society; by 1647 "England was more clearly on the verge of anarchy than at any other time in the century";¹⁵⁹ and the regicide of Charles I in January 1649 apparently confirmed the worst fears of many.

As the war progressed divisions emerged among those who fought the king.¹⁶⁰ These divisions were neither clear-cut nor immutable - to talk of Presbyterians and Independents is too simplistic¹⁶¹ - but the debates had important implications for Antinomianism. Religious Independents (favouring autonomous, congregational churches) and political Independents (preferring utterly to defeat the king) were not

¹⁵⁵ John Walter, "The Impact on Society: A World Turned Upside Down?", in John Morrill (ed.), *The Impact of the English Civil War*, 1991, p. 104.

¹⁵⁶ For elaboration of the unprecedented damage of war see Donald Pennington, "The War and the People", in John Morrill (ed.), *Reactions to the English Civil War 1642-1649*, 1982; John Morrill (ed.), *The Impact of the English Civil War*, 1991; Martyn Bennett, *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland 1638-1651*, Oxford, 1997; Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars. The Experience of the British Civil Wars 1638-1651*, 1992.

¹⁵⁷ Bennett, *Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland*, p. 260.

¹⁵⁸ Glenn Burgess, "The Impact on Political Thought: Rhetorics for Troubled Times", in John Morrill (ed.), *Reactions to the English Civil War 1642-1649*, 1982, p. 77; Pennington, "The War and the People", p. 134.

¹⁵⁹ John Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces. Conservatives and Radicals in the English Civil War*, 1990, p. 125.

¹⁶⁰ See Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age. A history of England 1603-1714*, 1980, pp. 192-195; George Yule, *Puritans in Politics. The Religious Legislation of the Long Parliament 1640-1647*, 1981, p. 215.

¹⁶¹ David Underdown, *Pride's Purge. Politics in the Puritan Revolution*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 45-46, 69; Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament 1648-1653*, 1974, pp. 4-6.

always the same people. This is also true of religious Presbyterians (who supported a national system of ecclesiastical authority) and political Presbyterians (who pursued a negotiated settlement with the king). Yet while it is undeniable that “none of the religious groups bears any absolute correspondence with the political ones”,¹⁶² there were connections between the two spheres of debate. These connections revolved around issues of law, authority and social hierarchy. For this reason, and under the pressure of polemical point-scoring, Antinomianism became guilty by association.

As David Underdown points out, the questions for which there were so many different answers revolved around matters of law.¹⁶³ As these were debated, one side - the “Presbyterians” - felt they were fighting to protect the law from those who would tear it down. In political terms this meant preserving some measure of traditional government; while in ecclesiastical terms it involved putting “the law back into grace” and warding off religious toleration, which “raised fundamental religious questions...of conscience and authority”.¹⁶⁴ And those who debated on the other side - the “Independents” - were much less concerned with traditional forms of authority.

If this meant promoting and encouraging the radical Puritans of the lower class, arming and organizing them, and stirring them up with the millenarian preaching of the Army chaplains and mechanic preachers, and if this led to the spread of dangerous, subversive opinions, this was a price they were willing to pay.¹⁶⁵

In all of these debates, whether religious or political, the issue at stake was generally one of authority and control.¹⁶⁶

It is no wonder, then, that Antinomianism - by definition, against the law - was dragged into the debate. It proved a useful weapon with which the more conservative

¹⁶² Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, p. 64.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁶⁴ Noel Henning Mayfield, *Puritans and the Regicide: Presbyterian-Independent Differences over the Trial and Execution of Charles (I) Stuart*, Lanham, MD, p. 159; Worden, *Rump Parliament*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁶ Worden, *Rump Parliament*, p. 6.

could assault the more radical. What better way to discredit the issue of religious toleration, for example, than to demonstrate where such convictions would inexorably lead: to immorality, subversion and anarchy? It proved so plausible to associate this radical group, socially careless and resistant to authority, with a reputedly radical Antinomianism, also averse to authority. As a result, Independency was linked irreparably to Antinomianism, and, once again, the true nature of Antinomianism was distorted. Its real intentions were difficult to discern when it was so badly misinterpreted for polemical ends.

These developments were intensified by the regicide. At the end of the decade, when the war was finally brought to a dramatic end, the English confronted a new and unfamiliar world in which traditional authority had apparently collapsed. It is true that such a context opened a window of opportunity for religious change, and, for example, William Dell and John Saltmarsh had been able to make the most of the relative doctrinal freedom they had found in the New Model army. In general, though, the Antinomians' brand of freedom was viewed with suspicion by most people, and liable to misunderstanding. By the end of the war there was

a very broad anxiety about the potentiality of sectarianism, or even an undifferentiated religious enthusiasm, to slip out of control into all sorts of moral and doctrinal disorder... . In part, these [were] potentialities long known to be inherent in Calvinism, which could be seen as a most potent seed-bearer of Antinomianism. The more solifidianism or predestination were emphasised, the more some saints might feel themselves to be above ordinances... . By 1649 [there was] a sense of impending disintegration.¹⁶⁷

This unease over these potentialities contributed to the growing moralism among Calvinists who felt compelled to constrain the behavioural implications of their own theology.

Thus the 1640s were hardly an ideal time for the Antinomians to suggest a return to the soteriological passivity and freedom of earlier days; it seemed an invitation to anarchy. The Antinomians ran the grave risk of being misinterpreted in such pressured times by an audience already out of step with their convictions. Indeed, they could be seen not only to approve the harrowing disorder that England was experiencing, they might even be said to have caused it!¹⁶⁸ Antinomianism, by definition and in the popular mind, was against the law, and that prospect was intolerable after so many years of devastating lawlessness. As early as 1643 John Sedgwick, still another critic of the Antinomians, fretted that “we live in Morrall Law opposing times”.¹⁶⁹ Many others were also disturbed.¹⁷⁰ Antinomianism was a doctrine “tending to the ruine and overthrow of a nation, both Church and State”; it would “fill the land with...disobedience to authority”.¹⁷¹ Even as the civil war began it exacerbated people’s fears and distorted contemporary impressions of Antinomianism.

For a complexity of reasons, therefore, the 1640s were not conducive to the reappearance of Antinomianism. Inevitably, these writers were opposed by quite a number of critics who serve to reveal the shifting dimensions of the debate. As each of these writers said his piece the definition of Antinomianism steadily diverged from its initial focus on the moral law. In 1643 John Sedgwick condemned “direct Antinomian[s]” who “make void the Law”.¹⁷² But just a year later an anonymous writer issued his *Declaration Against the Antinomians* in which he extracted seven of the

¹⁶⁸ See below, pp. 177-180.

¹⁶⁹ John Sedgwick, *Antinomianisme Anatomized. Or, A Glasse For The Lawlesse: Who deny the Ruling use of the Morrall Law unto Christians under the Gospel*, 1643, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ For example, see E[phraim] P[agitt], *Heresiography: Or, A description of the Heretickes and Sectaries of these latter times*, 1645, p. 94; [Anon.], *A Declaration Against the Antinomians, and their Doctrine of Liberty. Their chief Tenents briefly and fully answered*, 1644, p. 3.

¹⁷¹ [Anon.], *Declaration*, p. 6; Sedgwick, *Antinomianisme Anatomized*, p. 28.

¹⁷² Sedgwick, *Antinomianisme Anatomized*, p. 30.

Antinomians' "*chief Tenents*"; the law was not mentioned at all.¹⁷³ And in 1645 Ephraim Pagitt presented twenty-nine errors of the Antinomians; he referred to the law in just two of them.¹⁷⁴ Thereafter the definition of Antinomianism widened almost beyond recognition. In the hands of these many disputants the label took on a life of its own, and it is striking just how differently each of these writers conceived of Antinomianism.

Among them stood two men - two Presbyterians - whose voices rose above them all. Thomas Gataker, rector of Rotherhithe, Surrey, member of the Westminster Assembly and later a correspondent of Baxter's,¹⁷⁵ sustained a steady campaign against John Saltmarsh throughout the 1640s. Then, in 1648, a grim but popular Presbyterian pastor and Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, Samuel Rutherford, fired a massive broadside against the Antinomians in his disquisition, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist*.¹⁷⁶

Of these two assaults on Antinomianism, Thomas Gataker's was the more personal (focussing only on John Saltmarsh)¹⁷⁷ and the more constrained. Gataker was careful to justify his use of the Antinomian epithet - Saltmarsh sought to "oppose and oppugn all use of the *Law* among Christians" - but he astutely recognised that Saltmarsh had "become an *Architect* of a *new Sect*, that wants as yet a peculiar distinguishing name".¹⁷⁸ It was never to receive one, and Gataker persisted with an increasingly obsolete label. He defined an Antinomian with some accuracy as one who believed that

¹⁷³ [Anon.], *Declaration*, title page.

¹⁷⁴ P[agitt], *Heresiography*, pp. 92-93.

¹⁷⁵ CCRB, I. 102; DNB, 7.939-941.

¹⁷⁶ DNB, 17.496-498. Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist. Opening The secrets of Familisme and Antinomianisme in the Antichristian Doctrine of John Saltmarsh and Will. Dell*,...Robert Town, Tob: Crisp, H. Denne, Eaton, and others, 1648.

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, Thomas Gataker, *Shadowes without Substance, Or, Pretended new Lights...In way of Rejoynder unto Mr John Saltmarsh*, 1646, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 105.

salvation was without prior condition or preparation; that justification was completed in the death of Christ; that Christ repented fully and perfectly in the place of the elect; that His work was the only focus for assurance; and that God was neither angry with the sin of His children, nor did he punish it.¹⁷⁹

Gataker himself bears witness to the new moralism within Calvinism. He believed that “there is more than *faith* required unto *salvation*”.¹⁸⁰ He even argued that God’s “choice Wine” of salvation was “reserved for his reconciled friends”.¹⁸¹ This was hardly classic Protestant doctrine. His point was that God did not save sinners without evidence of some humiliation and repentance.¹⁸² The Antinomians’ pronouncements on the issue had struck a nerve. He was extremely worried that salvation, or the promise of it, would fall too easily into the lap of the “prophane wretch”.¹⁸³ The people he knew simply could not be trusted with such heady freedom.

By comparison, Samuel Rutherford’s discussion of Antinomianism was extremely wide-ranging, both in its depth of historical context and width of definition. Rutherford laboured to prove “how vainly *Antinomians* of our time boast that *Luther* is for them”.¹⁸⁴ Luther, he wrote speciously, “expresly declared himself against *Antinomians*, by that title and name”,¹⁸⁵ but his definition was far removed from Luther’s.¹⁸⁶ Rutherford also embraced a common misconception, that the Antinomians

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 59; Thomas Gataker, *A Mistake Or Misconstruction Removed...And, Free Grace, As it is held forth in Gods Word*, 1646, pp. 32-33. Gataker’s *Mistake* was republished as *Antinomianism Discovered and Confuted: And Free-Grace As it is held forth in Gods Word*, 1651.

¹⁸⁰ Gataker, *Mistake*, p. 11.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17. In a similar vein Stephen Geree explained that God “*justifies the ungodly*, and yet not *whilest he remains ungodly*”, Stephen Geree, *The Doctrines Of The Antinomians By Evidence of Gods Truth plainly Confuted*, 1644, p. 83.

¹⁸² Gataker, *Mistake*, p. 17, *Shadowes without Substance*, pp. 54, 56-57.

¹⁸³ Gataker, *Mistake*, p. 20.

¹⁸⁴ Rutherford, *Survey*, I. 69. See also I. 81, 86. He devoted almost 100 pages to the task, and he even supplied the text of *Against the Antinomians* in I. 69-80.

¹⁸⁵ Rutherford, *Survey*, I. 87.

¹⁸⁶ Not that the law was entirely absent from it; see *ibid.*, I. 118, 120, 122.

were Libertines. The two traditions, so distinct in the sixteenth century, were now assimilated.¹⁸⁷ Very early in his book Rutherford laid out the “chiefe errors of *Libertines*, which I prove to be holden expresly, or by undeniable consequences by *Antinomians* and *Familists*”.¹⁸⁸

Rutherford’s connection of Antinomianism and Familism was similar to that with Libertinism, and equally gratuitous. The Familists believed in bringing the believer to some sort of mystical perfection, thereby vanquishing sin.¹⁸⁹ Their “sudden appearance” in sixteenth-century England “caused grave anxiety, sometimes horror, within the upper reaches of society”, and hostile contemporaries associated it with “subversiveness and social evil”.¹⁹⁰ During the seventeenth century the label was applied

with considerable frequency and a conspicuous lack of precision...to heretics and radicals covering a wide spectrum of theological and intellectual positions, with no intimate relation to one another...[but generally] holding crudely perfectionist or libertine beliefs... . The beliefs of such groups were frequently perceived, at least in literary comment, as being linked to sexually licentious lifestyles.¹⁹¹

The word was a useful polemical tool, then, and Rutherford was not the only one to employ it.¹⁹² Thus in his work the definition of Antinomian careered out of control. Reflecting the two sides of Calvin’s Libertines, it now incorporated spiritual mysticism and all kinds of licentious practice. As a result, Antinomianism was made to seem much more radical and extreme than it ever intended to be.

¹⁸⁷ This thought had appeared elsewhere. Weld employed it in the title of his work, attacking “Antinomians...and Libertines”, and see also Thomas Blakewell, *The Antinomians Christ Confounded, And The Lords Christ Exalted*, 1644, p. 29; Burton, *Law And the Gospell reconciled*, To the Reader.

¹⁸⁸ Rutherford, *Survey*, I. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Christopher Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 20-22, 76. For a Continental perspective, see George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed., Kirksville, MO, 1992, pp. 724-731, 1209-1211; Irvin Buckwalter Horst, *The Radical Brethren. Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558*, Nieuwkoop, 1972, pp. 152-154.

¹⁹⁰ Marsh, *Family of Love*, pp. 1, 4.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹⁹² For instance, Thomas Weld connected the same three groups in his title, *A Short Story Of The Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists, & Libertines, that infected the Churches of New England*.

Despite this divergence of interpretation, all of these writers were united in their conviction that Antinomianism issued in licentious living, and this gave the association of Libertinism added plausibility. The unknown author of the *Declaration against the Antinomians* spoke for all his fellow-critics:

This Doctrine of theirs is a very nursery for wickednesse and vice... [T]his damnable doctrine of beating down a sanctified, spirituall, pious and holy life, is a dangerous errour, and gives way exceedingly to looseness, and none can be imagined more dangerous in that kind then it is... This [doctrine] never checks [a person's] lusts, nor stays his malice, it cannot stop his mouth from drunkennesse, nor his heart from pride, dissimulation, and all manner of evill.¹⁹³

This was an oft-repeated sentiment.¹⁹⁴ The fear that Antinomian doctrine would reach the ears of the “prophane wretch” energised the efforts of these men to stamp it out.

But these critics were being unfair to the Antinomians. Tobias Crisp, John Saltmarsh and William Dell were certainly not Libertines and they were utterly opposed to licentiousness. Despite the accusations of Samuel Rutherford, these men did not deny the Scriptures, the deity of Christ or heaven and hell, and they did not believe in one spirit who occupied all creatures.¹⁹⁵ The marrying of Antinomianism and Libertinism was unfair, unwarranted and gratuitous. Of course, it is possible that others did match his description, but not these writers most commonly attacked. Nor were they immoral, indulgent and licentious. Dell scorned the suggestion that a Christian could live as he wished, and that both sin and sinner should be tolerated.¹⁹⁶ Tobias Crisp, always sensitive to the charge, repeatedly denied that his doctrine was a cloak for immorality.¹⁹⁷ In fact, the Antinomians argued that their doctrine was the best means of

¹⁹³ [Anon.], *Declaration*, pp. 4, 6.

¹⁹⁴ For example, see Sedgwick, *Antinomianisme Anatomized*, pp. 28, 31; Gere, *Doctrines Of The Antinomians...Confuted*, To the Reader, pp. 37-38; Blakewell, *Antinomians Christ Confounded*, pp. 27-28; Rutherford, *Survey*, I. 3, II. 1, 221; Gataker, *Mistake*, pp. 16, 20; Edwards, *Gangraena*, III. 185.

¹⁹⁵ Rutherford, *Survey*, I. 22-24, 65, 66, 67.

¹⁹⁶ Dell, *Right Reformation*, pp. 26, 27.

¹⁹⁷ Crisp explained this at length in a sermon entitled “Christian Libertie No Licentious Doctrine”, *Fourteene Sermons*, pp. 219-256. See also, *Ten Sermons*, pp. 34, 43-45, 102.

ensuring a holy life.¹⁹⁸ They cultivated a place for good works, but without allowing them any role in justification.¹⁹⁹ Works were performed from life, not for it; a believer lived a holy life not to be saved, but out of gratitude that he had already been saved.²⁰⁰ So Saltmarsh urged the need to “strive against sin” which was still present in the believer;²⁰¹ no perfectionism here. He warned his readers not to neglect mortification; he urged them to live as if their sins had not been forgiven; he even stated that Christ’s obedience and repentance in the sinner’s place still required that sinner himself to repent,²⁰² but this was brushed aside by his hostile and suspicious critics.

In fact, these Antinomians were not “Antinomian” at all, if the word is to be used with any sort of integrity.²⁰³ William Dell denied that he was against God’s laws and government; he preached the “*Law of a new nature*” and the “government of Christ”.²⁰⁴ “*Do we therefore make voide the Law*”, asked John Saltmarsh, no, “*we establish the Law, Christ being the end of the Law for righteousness*”.²⁰⁵ “I suppose”, Tobias Crisp explained,

some Persons conceive I aim at the abolishing of the Law...I have therefore, on purpose, pitch’d hereon, to shew the use of the Law unto Believers... . The summ is this, it serves to revive Sin, to be a rule to avoid Sin, and to discover Wrath to Sinners... . Now had we not directions from the Law, Men would live as they list... . [So] we are under the Law still, or else we are lawless.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229, *Ten Sermons*, p. 33; Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, p. 74. Christopher Hill expresses unnecessary cynicism about Crisp’s conviction on this point (Hill, “Tobias Crisp”, pp. 155-156). In the same way Luther repeatedly claimed that his theology best promoted holy living, and there is no cause to treat him with cynicism. For instance, see his *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. xi, xiv, xvi, xvii-iii.

¹⁹⁹ Crisp, *Ten Sermons*, pp. 72, 98, 99, 101, *Fourteene Sermons*, pp. 250, 298, 300, 305, 308.

²⁰⁰ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, pp. 147-149, 152; Crisp, *Ten Sermons*, p. 34. This is a crucial distinction, Solt, *Saints in Arms*, pp. 36-37.

²⁰¹ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, pp. 59-64.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 141, *Sparkles of Glory*, pp. 323, 325.

²⁰³ Leo Solt is too cautious when he says the word is “slightly misleading”, Solt, *Saints in Arms*, p.

28.

²⁰⁴ Dell, *Right Reformation*, p. 26.

²⁰⁵ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, p. 43. See also pp. 42, 146, 150.

²⁰⁶ Crisp, *Ten Sermons*, pp. 89-90, 92, 93. Crisp used the moral law to preach the gospel to sinners. For instance, see Crisp, *Fourteene Sermons*, p. 239. His point was this: “I doe not say the Law is absolutely abolished, but it is abolished in respect of the curse of it; to every man that is a free man of Christ”, *Fourteene Sermons*, p. 245.

Antinomianism, in its strictest sense, had little relevance to these writers.

Thus Crisp and Saltmarsh rejected the labels that were thrust upon them. Crisp lamented that “this word, liberty, hath gotten an ill name in this world”, partly because of those who abused it, but also “through the malignity of some spirits, that strike even at the heart of Christ, through the sides of those that are Christs, laying reproachfull, ignominious, and shamefull names, upon them of libertinisme”. “I am not ashamed to speak it”, he continued carefully, to

be called a *Libertine*, is the gloriousest title under heaven; take a *Libertine* for one that is *truly free by Christ*. To be made free by Christ, in proper construction, is no other but this; to be made a *Libertine* by Christ: I doe not say, to be made a *Libertine* in the corrupt sence of it, but to be a *Libertine* in the true and proper sence of the word. It is true indeed, Christ doth not give liberty unto licentiousnesse of life and conversation.²⁰⁷

Likewise, Saltmarsh rejected the title of Antinomian. “Can the *Free-grace* of *Jesus Christ*”, he asked, “tempt any one to sin of it self? Can a *good tree bring forth evil fruit*? And shall we call every one *Antinomian* that speaks *Free-grace*... . . .I hope by this time *Free-grace* is no *Antinomianism* amongst beleevers”.²⁰⁸ These men repudiated such misleading labels, even though their critics happily continued to misuse them.

Thomas Gataker was almost right. Crisp, Saltmarsh and Dell were not a new group in need of a name, they were an old group caught by the shifting dimensions of English Protestantism. The Antinomian label was an inadequate attempt to discredit and define a doctrine that had become steadily less acceptable. John Saltmarsh objected to the “trick” of wielding the word.²⁰⁹ And Baxter observed that “[a]s for the term ‘Antinomian’...the name is taken from one of the least of their great Errors; it should have rather been taken from the greater”.²¹⁰ Not that this hindered him from using the

²⁰⁷ Crisp, *Fourteene Sermons*, pp. 226-227.

²⁰⁸ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, “An Occasional Word”.

²⁰⁹ Saltmarsh, *Reasons For Unitie*, pp. 29-30.

²¹⁰ Richard Baxter, *Rich. Baxter's Admonition To Mr William Eyre Of Salisbury; Concerning his Miscarriages in a Book lately Written for the Justification of Infidels*, 1654, p. 6. In *Rich. Baxters Apology*.

word, and historians, trapped by the language of contemporaries, must also persist with it. It is important to recognise, though, that the label is inappropriate, and that the technical issue of the law certainly did not provide the point of most heated conflict. The Antinomians were so objectionable because they promoted the kind of passivity in justification that Luther had preached so freely over a century before, at a time when those ideas were out of fashion. Indeed, according to John Saltmarsh many of his contemporaries thought that Luther had gone too far. "Thus we can pick and chuse from a *Reformer*", he observed critically, "what fits to the *standard* of our own *Light and Reformation*, and cast the other by".²¹¹ He was not far wrong.

Too willing to accept the witness of these hostile contemporaries, historians have been mistaken about the origins of Antinomianism. They assume it was a doctrine of the fringe, a wild extension of high Calvinist convictions. Hans Boersma speaks for many when he says that "Antinomianism has clear historical roots in the Calvinist tradition".²¹² It is unlikely that the Antinomians were unaffected by Calvinism, but Boersma's emphasis is misplaced. True, their critics often sought to resolve the issue in Calvinist terms, giving the impression of a direct lineage, but this does not mean that Antinomianism itself was a Calvinist mutation. Indeed, Antinomianism was a doctrine of the centre, but found itself unhappily on the fringe. England's seventeenth-century Antinomians were much more likely to appeal to Luther than to Calvin. Their opponents spoke of the "elect", but they wrote of "believers". From its inception

²¹¹ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, p. 210.

²¹² Hans Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 70. Christopher Hill also says that Antinomianism "attended on Calvinism like a shadow", "Antinomianism in 17th-century England", p. 177; and Peter Toon explores its connections with "Hyper-Calvinism" in *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765*, 1967, pp. 144-149. See also Thomas, "The Break-Up of Nonconformity", p. 40. One exception to this is A. L. Morton, who mistakenly sees in John Saltmarsh a rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of election, in favour of universal redemption, A. L. Morton, *The World of the Ranters. Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution*, 1970, p. 50.

Antinomianism sought to preserve and nourish Luther's emphasis on free, unearned, unaided and often unsought-for grace in salvation. Ultimately, the Antinomian debate played out a battle for Luther; Calvin himself was much less relevant.

This has profound implications for the reality of a Protestant consensus in seventeenth-century England. Those who were in fact the most orthodox, in terms of the convictions of this central reformer, were those most loudly accused of heresy. Of course, orthodoxy and heresy are artificial constructs open to redefinition by those in positions of power, but by condemning the Antinomians in this way English Protestants effectively repudiated those ideals that supposedly lay at the heart of their own tradition. And in the process Antinomianism was steadily marginalised. So complete was its eventual defeat that some Anglican historians have tried to deny that the Church of England was ever Protestant at all!²¹³ The whole debate was in large part a struggle for the power of definition within authentic English Protestantism.

So by the late 1640s the notion of Antinomianism had undergone considerable change since its conception over a century earlier. Luther had used it in a narrow sense to describe those who believed that the law should not be preached to Christians. When the label surfaced in England during the 1620s and 1630s this is largely how it was used. New England Antinomianism was a distinct variant, but the response of its enemies was consonant with that in England. In both instances Antinomianism provoked fears of authority undermined. Great change occurred during the 1640s when the definition of Antinomianism was widened beyond recognition; the issue of the law was buried under a refuse heap of heresy and error. Nothing did more to encourage this broadening than the assimilation of Antinomianism and Libertinism. In the end

²¹³ Tyacke, "Anglican Attitudes", pp. 139-141.

Antinomianism had come to mean just about anything. This demonstrates that Antinomianism did not exist as a theoretical ideal in England. To earlier critics (even John Sedgwick in 1643) it was an issue of the law; to Thomas Gataker it was one of conditions; to Samuel Rutherford it was mystical and practical Libertinism; many others decried its licentiousness; while the Antinomians themselves believed that it was the best way of cultivating a holy life. Historians must recognise that this one word had vastly different meanings for different people. To one it was the death of holy living; to another it was the best means of promoting it.

It is, then, possible to talk of seventeenth-century Antinomianism in two different ways. First, the word describes the doctrine of justification by faith alone, embraced by those who took Luther at his word. Second, the same word also conveys a polemical construct designed to discredit the opposition. It is important that historians do not confuse the two, even if they must persist in using the Antinomian label to designate both. And for this reason historians should also be wary of relying on the testimony of the doctrine's critics to ascertain its nature and growth.²¹⁴ They were pursuing their own agendas, to which Antinomianism - the doctrine - was not always relevant. The truth is not as simple as it seems.

The only factor that remained constant among these critics was the associated fear of licentiousness if Antinomian doctrine fell into the wrong hands. Luther said it was the right message for the wrong audience; Calvin was aghast at the sinful indulgences of the Libertines; and every other critic of Antinomianism picked up on its supposed practical effects. The worry was not so much the Antinomians themselves, but their audience. What was to stop wilful sinners from comforting themselves that if

²¹⁴ For one example of such reliance, see Christopher Hill, "Antinomianism in 17th-century England", p. 164, 171, and "Dr Tobias Crisp", pp. 149-150.

they just believed they were saved and forgiven, they probably were? The point is, of course, that this very audience would find these lengthy anti-Antinomian treatises inaccessible or unappealing. So those who wrote against the Antinomians were either oblivious to this or, more likely, theirs was a campaign for the pulpits and preaching of England's pastors. They may not have been able to take their message to their intended audience, but they could help to shape the message that was. Theirs was functional polemic, and, again, it was an issue of control.

The 1640s, therefore, witnessed prolific debate over the issues raised by Antinomianism. This escalation was sparked especially by the published works of Crisp, Eaton and Saltmarsh, which were met with a chorus of disapproval as one writer after another sought to demolish their doctrine. In 1649 a fresh pen joined their ranks. He was a little-known, thirty-four year old pastor from Kidderminster in Worcestershire. Long after the debate had begun, this man, Richard Baxter, offered a contribution of his own. His experience proves that a fear of Antinomianism was always a pastoral concern; it reveals a now-familiar pattern of misunderstanding and polemic; and, above all, it demonstrates the profound link between this Antinomian controversy and the context of civil war out of which it arose.

Chapter Three

PERSONALITY AND POLEMIC

[B]ecause the Antinomians deny it, let us prove it.¹

Richard Baxter's 1649 contribution to the Antinomian debate heralded the beginning of a unique writing career. It was prolific in every way: Baxter was the author of almost 150 books;² the last of them was finally published over 300 years after he wrote it;³ his two most prominent books are still in print today;⁴ the size of his works was often imposing - the largest is well over one million words long;⁵ the approximate length of all his published writings is over ten million words;⁶ and all this from a man who was burdened by severe illness and other

¹ Richard Baxter, *Universal Redemption Of Mankind, By The Lord Jesus Christ: Stated and Cleared by the late Learned Mr. Richard Baxter. Whereunto is added a short Account of Special Redemption, by the same Author*, 1694, p. 398.

² The official list appears in Nuttall, *Richard Baxter*, pp. 131-136. The entries of Baxter's publications sprawl over ten double-columned pages of Donald Wing's short-title catalogue, John J. Morrison and Carolyn W. Nelson (eds), *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British America...1641-1700 Compiled by Donald Wing*, 2nd ed., New York, 1994, vol. 1, pp. 206-215.

³ This is Baxter's "Poor Husbandman's Advocate", edited by F. J. Powicke in "The Reverend Richard Baxter's Last Treatise", *BJRL*, 103 (1926), pp. 163-218.

⁴ These are *The Reformed Pastor* (still a required text in some seminaries) and *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*.

⁵ In his introduction to *Works*, vol. 1, J. I. Packer estimates the length of Baxter's *Christian Directory* (1673) to be a million-and-a-quarter words. The book, in four parts, occupies over 900 tightly-packed, double-columned pages of *Works*, vol. 1.

⁶ Based on the approximate length of his *Christian Directory*, Baxter's practical works alone absorb over five million words. They account for around half of his printed space.

distractions throughout a busy life. These works covered every conceivable area of theological terrain: soteriology, ecclesiology, political thought, apologetics, church history, and practical and pastoral theology. It is easy to miss the trees for the wood, but a prominent number of these many works was dedicated to destroying Antinomianism.

This is true of almost every soteriological work that Baxter ever published, beginning, dramatically, with the *Aphorismes of Justification* in 1649. It also informed his 1653 treatise on assurance, *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience*. These provoked controversy, and in 1654 Baxter responded by publishing his lengthy five-part *Apology* against Thomas Blake, George Kendall, Lewis Du Moulin, William Eyre and John Crandon. He accused each of these men (except Blake) of holding Antinomian tenets.⁷ This collection launched Baxter's heaviest attack on Antinomianism, but it was quickly followed by *Rich: Baxter's Confession of his Faith* (1655) in which he spread out the map of his objections to Antinomian doctrine.

During the 1660s Baxter was largely silent on the issue of Antinomianism, but controversy flared anew when he published his much-expanded *Life of Faith* in 1670. A year later he rebuked the Antinomians again in a relatively brief contribution to contemporary debate, *How Far Holinesse Is The Design Of Christianity. An Appeal to the Light* (1674) responded to criticism from the Independents of his preaching against Antinomianism, which remained a target of his weighty *Catholick Theologie* in 1675 and *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* a year later.

There followed another lull in Baxter's assault on Antinomianism, before Tobias Crisp's complete works were republished in 1690, sparking fresh debate. Baxter reacted immediately to this new, yet familiar, Antinomian threat by publishing two treatises

⁷ See Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 44-56, for an excellent account of the issues involved in Baxter's debate with each of these opponents.

which combined to form *The Scripture Gospel defended*. His final attack on Antinomianism followed a year later - the year of his death - in *An End of Doctrinal Controversies*. Only death made this the last of his regular outbursts against Antinomianism, and the doctrinal controversies that he hoped to end carried on unabated.

Simply listing these titles suggests Baxter's substantial concern over Antinomianism. The periods of silence are enormously significant, but from first to last he was prompted to attack Antinomian doctrine as he defined it. No one has ever distilled from these writings exactly what he considered Antinomianism to be. Nor has anyone asked why he was prompted to battle the Antinomians so vehemently and so tenaciously. It is true that the same confluence of forces that buffeted Antinomianism in the 1640s tended to channel Baxter - a Presbyterian army chaplain - away from their theology. But more than that, his fierce reaction can be explained in terms of what he called his "naturall temper".⁸ It was in large part Baxter's nature, his temperament, that forced from him this bitter opposition to Antinomianism. He was a man inclined towards controversy and concerned about Christian practice. His personality also enabled him to lay out in all of these writings a polemical construction of Antinomianism that was clear and intensely ordered, even if it was hostile and ultimately inaccurate. There was, in other words, an indissoluble bond that linked Baxter's personality, these writings and his steadfast opposition to the Antinomian system as he saw it.

⁸

Baxter to John Humfrey, 13 March 1657/8: DWL MS BC i. 203r (CCRB #437).

Controversial Inclinations

Born in 1615 - at Rowton in Shropshire; the only child of modest, Puritan parents - Richard Baxter was always a serious-minded boy. His sins of youth were unremarkable.⁹ "No sooner began he to be capable to know good from evil than he was observed to send out the fragrant Blossoms of an holy life, in...reprehending others for rash Oaths, and obscene Speeches, which was no small matter of joy to his parents".¹⁰ He was a delight to his parents, then, but hardly one to his playmates. The event is suggestive of a trait that was indelibly to stamp its mark on his character and his reputation. Baxter quickly developed the unfortunate combination of an eagerness to correct the errors of others and a disastrous lack of tact.¹¹ It revealed itself constantly. "Baxter's disputatious temper, asperity and argumentative tenacity were remarkable even for an age habituated to combative controversy".¹² Thus Antinomian controversy was a magnet that easily attracted his disputatious temper.

There was no shortage of those whom Baxter offended in the course of his life. Both friends and foes alike expressed their disapproval of his controversial style. John Humfrey, who later joined Baxter in his fight for comprehension, warned him that he was "too dogmaticall" in his style, and "so violent, eager, sowre, from the very first".¹³ Peter Ince was another friend who repeatedly implored Baxter to move away from

⁹ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 2.

¹⁰ R. Taylor, *The Life and Death of That Pious, Reverend, Learned, and Laborious Minister of the Gospel Mr Richard Baxter*, 1692, p. 5. William Bates made a similar point in his *Funeral Sermon For The Reverend, Holy and Excellent Divine, Mr. Richard Baxter*, 1692, p. 87. At the end of his life Baxter recalled that "from the first of my remembrance I liked Religious Goodness, and feared sinning", *Richard Baxter's Penitent Confession, And His Necessary Vindication*, 1691, p. 8.

¹¹ F. J. Powicke, *The Reverend Richard Baxter Under the Cross (1662-1691)*, 1927, p. 254.

¹² N. H. Keeble, 'Loving & Free Converse': *Richard Baxter in his Letters*, 1991, p. 10.

¹³ John Humfrey to Baxter, 11 May 1654: DWL MS BC i. 193v (CCRB #179), [c.autumn 1657]: DWL MS BC i. 197r (CCRB #397).

controversial works and to focus instead on matters of practical theology.¹⁴ Other allies also offered advice. Simeon Ashe, a man whose irenic tendencies Baxter admired, found Baxter himself to be too dogmatic; Giles Firmin, who helped to promote Baxter's system of voluntary associations of ministers, wondered at his "*magisterial spirit*"; and Archbishop John Tillotson, a warm friend of Baxter's after the Restoration, was well aware of the man's "high and peremptory censuring those he dissented from...with too much magisterialness".¹⁵

For every friend who cautioned Baxter like this there were four or five others who spoke only out of indignation or contempt. George Ashwell, for example, was justifiably astonished first by Baxter's unexpected and heavy-handed public denunciation of his book on the Apostles' Creed, and then by his refusal to apologise for it.¹⁶ In twenty years of experience John Tombes, a neighbouring minister, had seen no softening of Baxter's arrogance and "unbrotherly spirit".¹⁷ John Hinckley, who disputed with Baxter over conformity, scorned his "lofty and Magisterial" strain.¹⁸ Edward Stillingfleet, Latitudinarian Bishop of Worcester, criticised Baxter's "Anger, and unbecoming Passion", as well as his "malicious way of Reproaching".¹⁹ And George Morley, a long-time antagonist of Baxter's, was frustrated with his style "which is so *Magisterial*, and with that contempt, undervaluing and vilifying those he writes against,

¹⁴ Peter Ince to Baxter, 8 December [1653]: DWL MS BC i. 9r (CCRB #152), 5 September [1654]: DWL MS BC iv. 247r (CCRB #199), 21 April [1655]: DWL MS BC iii. 179r (CCRB #242).

¹⁵ Simeon Ashe to Robert Baillie, [January 1656]: David Lang (ed.), *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie, Principal of the University of Glasgow, 1637-1662*, vol. 3, Edinburgh, 1842, p. 307; Giles Firmin to Baxter, 9 September 1671: DWL MS BC v. 152r (CCRB #850); John Tillotson to Matthew Sylvester, 3 February 1691/92: DWL MS BC ii. 76v (CCRB #1260).

¹⁶ George Ashwell to Baxter, 28 August 1657: DWL MS BC iii. 68r (CCRB #391), 3 March 1657/[8]: DWL MS BC ii. 102r (CCRB #433).

¹⁷ John Tombes to Baxter, 22 August 1670: DWL MS BC ii. 242r (CCRB #816).

¹⁸ John Hinckley, *Fasciculus Literarum: Or, Letters on Several Occasions Betwixt Mr. Baxter and the Author of the Perswasive to Conformity*, 1680, preface, p. 40.

¹⁹ Edward Stillingfleet, *The Unreasonableness of Separation: Or, An Impartial Account of the History, Names, and Pleas of the Present Separation from the Church of England*, 1681, pp. lix-lxi.

or that write against him, and sometimes with such exasperating and provoking language as very ill becomes him that pretends to be a *Peace maker*”.²⁰

It is possible that these critics were being unfair to Baxter. They were not. Even his friends pointed out his faults, the offences are too frequent to be ignored, and one episode is enough to show that the criticisms were appropriate. In 1673 Baxter took to task Edward Eccleston, a younger minister of former acquaintance, who had conformed against Baxter’s advice and without informing him. The extended correspondence between them is the fullest example of Baxter’s controversial style at work. It provides an ideal demonstration of Baxter’s unshakeable tenacity in debate, and it reveals the unpleasant effect his belligerence could have on his opponents.

Baxter began the dispute, demanding to know Eccleston’s reasons for his about-face on conformity, “a very heynous sin”. He implied that “selfishnes and carnall interest” lay behind Eccleston’s decision.²¹ Eccleston responded with an implication of his own, that Baxter was one of many “whose hearts and tongues are sett on fire against all that differ from them in things of doubtfull dispute”.²² Baxter stood by his ground in a much longer reply: conformity was an extremely grave sin, and he implied again that “passion and lust” would profit from it.²³ Eccleston was dismayed and offended. He asked Baxter to weigh his own heart for “humility or moderation” and objected to Baxter’s libels:

one is impudent, another is a liar, conformers upon latitudinarian principles are secret infidels, you are as sure that conformity is a sin as you are that christianity is true, I am rash, confused, a liar unfaithfull to you and my selfe...: enough, enough sir, is this your charity, and moderation? or is not this wretched censoriousnes? are not these the expressions of mighty self conceit?...if you can not debate a matter of doubtfull disputation without all this inhumane snarling and

²⁰ [George Morley], *The Bishop of Winchester’s Vindication Of Himself from divers False, Scandalous and Injurious Reflexions made upon him by Mr. Richard Baxter in several of his Writings*, 1683, p. 48.

²¹ Baxter to Edward Eccleston, 9 July 1673: DWL MS BC ii. 200r, 201r (CCRB #910).

²² Eccleston to Baxter, 14 July 1673: DWL MS BC ii. 205r (CCRB #912).

²³ Baxter to Eccleston, 2 August 1673: DWL MS BC ii. 217r (CCRB #914).

grinning wise men will not meddle with you...I am troubled to take this boldnes with you, but tis private and what you need.²⁴

In an irritable and sarcastic reply, Baxter refused to accept these accusations.²⁵

Eccleston in turn provided fifteen examples of Baxter's "uncivill language" and "vicious scolding" which could only have "proceeded from a foul stomach".²⁶ The correspondence continued back and forth with neither disputant giving ground. Finally, Eccleston wearied of the unwelcome attention; "private debates with you are endless", he wrote in desperation, "I pray god this controversy be not ere long turned out of doores".²⁷

Eccleston's was not an isolated experience, and well before his death Baxter had gained a widespread reputation for haughty and offensive censoriousness.²⁸ The basic elements of this unfortunate reputation were expressed in an angry letter of 1691 from John Troughton junior.²⁹ Troughton defended his late father from Baxter's ill-timed abuse, but his criticisms were common currency: Baxter's apparently infallible understanding could never be questioned; he attacked the man - even a dead man - rather than his error; and he was harsh, rude, angry, passionate and unreasonable. This same reputation also made its way into Samuel Young's *Vindiciae Anti-Baxterianae*. Young criticised Baxter's hypocrisy, and the combination of self-flattery and abrasive criticism.³⁰ "There was no end with Mr. Baxter", he lamented; "[h]e was an *Everlasting*

²⁴ Eccleston to Baxter, 25 August 1673: DWL MS BC ii. 206r (CCRB #917).

²⁵ Baxter to Eccleston, 30 August 1673: DWL MS BC ii. 207r-209v (CCRB #920).

²⁶ Eccleston to Baxter, 22 September 1673: DWL MS BC ii. 187r (CCRB #928).

²⁷ Eccleston to Baxter, 27 October 1673: DWL MS BC v. 164r (CCRB #932). Around 6 October 1673 Baxter had written to Ambrose Sparry and Thomas Willesby - both former members of Baxter's Worcestershire Association - explaining the situation and asking them to arbitrate in the matter. He regretted offering unsolicited advice (not, he said, his usual practice) and he lamented some "sharpnes in my style". He excused all this by his fear of "dawbing with sin". DWL MS BC ii. 210r-v (CCRB #930).

²⁸ "You know I am thought so keene in Controversies my selfe", he admitted as early as 1673. Baxter to Thomas Hotchkis, 4 September 1673: DWL MS BC iii. 129r (CCRB #922).

²⁹ John Troughton [jun.] to Baxter, 12 March 1690/1: DWL MS BC v. 57r-58r (CCRB #1224). For the context of this letter, see below, p. 264.

³⁰ Young, *Vindiciae Anti-Baxterianae*, pp. 79, 201-202.

Argument".³¹ Baxter "would awaken *Sleepy Controversies*, rake dead men out of their graves, and hang them up *for open view*".³² Who, he wondered, "can escape this Defamer?"³³ He was not alone.

Baxter was not alive to respond to Young's criticisms, but their nature would not have surprised him. Throughout his life these same accusations had been made continually. Baxter's response was a mixture of recognition, defensive indignation and hopeless optimism. This optimism was evident in the self-review which he conducted in 1664, as part of his autobiography. He recalled that in the past he had been

very apt to start up Controversies in the way of my Practical Writings, and also more desirous to acquaint the World with all that I took to be the Truth, and to assault those Books by Name which I thought did tend to deceive them, and did contain unsound and dangerous Doctrine.³⁴

But since then Baxter had, so he claimed, matured in his experience and moved away from controversy. He had discovered that many disputes were matters of semantics rather than substance. Also, too many of his opponents had responded badly to his well-intentioned interventions. As a result, Baxter's reluctance had grown so great that "to confess the Truth, I am lately much prone to the contrary Extream, to be too indifferent what Men hold, and to keep my Judgment to my self, and never to mention any thing wherein I differ from another...and leave him to his own Opinion".³⁵

This is what Baxter liked to believe, but Edward Eccleston and many others could have quickly disabused him of such illusions. Baxter's self-portrait of a peace-loving man desiring to leave controversy well alone, painfully aware of its damage and ineffectuality, was foolishly optimistic at best, and dishonest at worst. Yet it is this picture that energises the efforts of Baxter's many hagiographers, who have enshrined

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³² *Ibid.*, "To all *Baxterians*...", p. 5. The irony is that the man Young attacked was himself dead.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

³⁴ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 125.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 126.

his self-review as a sculpture of sainthood.³⁶ More realistically, William Lamont discerns that “[n]ot all of his contemporaries would have recognised this irenic figure”,³⁷ and he warns that there was “a darker side to Baxter’s nature”.³⁸ There was indeed.

Baxter knew there was a problem, but his concessions were minimal. It was merely a matter of style, he explained to John Humfrey;³⁹ his passionate attacks on error suggested a hatred of those that held it. Several times in his *Apology* Baxter acknowledged this “frailty, and proneness to be over-eager and keen, and unmannerly in my stile”.⁴⁰ His language was heated, but his heart was not.⁴¹ He offered much the same defence to various correspondents.⁴² These admissions apart, however, Baxter was always more likely to blame the faults of his opponents. For example, in his response to Giles Firmin’s 1671 friendly-enough suggestion of a magisterial spirit, he began,

I thinke I love not uncharitablenes, nor an imposing magisteriall spirit. But I like not the pride and tendernes of those, that think that all men are morose and harsh and surly that do not flatter them, and call evill good, and that do suppose them to be fallible, to erre or to be men: which is growne the vice of more divines, than the Prelates in this age... . And yet have we not yet learned to beare from one another a contradiction which supposeth us to erre?⁴³

This was typical of Baxter’s responses. He barely apologised for his aggressive style, and attributed most of the cause of controversy to the faults of his combatants. Utterly certain of the truth of his own position, he preferred to blame others for not patiently enduring his harsh criticisms. He was not “morose and harsh and surly”, they were

³⁶ For the single exception to this, see Herbert Dunelm’s critical (but somewhat confused) assessment in “Richard Baxter”, *Contemporary Review*, 127 (1925), pp. 50-58.

³⁷ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; Lamont, “[Review of] Keeble”, p. 182.

³⁹ Baxter to John Humfrey, 13 March 1657/8: DWL MS BC i. 203r (CCRB #437).

⁴⁰ Richard Baxter, *Rich. Baxters Account Given to his Reverend brother Mr T. Blake of the Reasons of his Dissent From The Doctrine of his Exceptions in his late Treatise of the Covenants*, 1654, preface. In *Rich. Baxters Apology*.

⁴¹ Baxter to John Humfrey, 13 March 1657/8: DWL MS BC i. 203r (CCRB #437).

⁴² For example, see Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BC vi. 96r, 98v (CCRB #22), 7 November 1649: DWL MS BT xiv. 109v, item #324 (CCRB #25); Baxter to Samuel Whittell, 17 March 1654[/5]: DWL MS BT vii. 326r, item #273 (CCRB #226); Baxter to [Matthew Poole], 26 June 1658: DWL MS BC iv. 242v (CCRB #463); Baxter to John Cheyney, 3 June 1682: DWL MS BC ii. 75r (CCRB #1109).

⁴³ Baxter to Giles Firmin, 28 September 1671: DWL MS BC iii. 280 (CCRB #852).

proud and unteachable. And he never seemed to wonder whether his opponents might be right after all.

The curious thing is that he constantly claimed a distaste for debate. Even as early as 1649 he explained to John Warren that he had never “yet seene a good issue of any [controversy]”, and he lamented his former love of “disputations” and the prejudice and passion they had cultivated in him.⁴⁴ As in his self-review, Baxter spoke, too optimistically, as a man recently freed from his affliction. Two years later, in the second edition of his *Saints’ Everlasting Rest* - the first edition had been criticised for indulging in unnecessary controversy - he regretted the need for controversies. They “discompose my Spirit, and wast[e] my zeal, my Love and Delight in God”. “I long to have done with them”, he declared.⁴⁵ So with one hand he protested his reluctance, and with the other he continued to lavish on controversy all the attention of a jealous lover.

Elsewhere he tried to rationalise the contradiction. Put most simply, he likened controversy to swallowing unpleasant medicine in the pursuit of health.⁴⁶ It was a distasteful means to a desirable end. In 1673 he explained this to Alexander Pitcairne, claiming “I could wish that Controversies had never come into the world, and I endeavour to drive them out againe: But not by ignorant contempt, and slothfull neglecting them”.⁴⁷ Paradoxically, peace could be achieved only by making war. At the end of his life he admitted, innocent to the irony, that he had crafted “numerous Volumes of Controversie, written all to end Controversies”.⁴⁸ So while Baxter’s aim was positive, inevitably his focus was negative.

I resolve...in all rather to destroy other mens ungrounded opinions (and take down vain Confidence) than to build up any more unnecessary ones in their stead, and rather to shew what

⁴⁴ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BC vi. 96r-v (CCRB #22).

⁴⁵ Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, 2nd ed., 1651, premonition.

⁴⁶ Baxter, *Rich. Baxters Account*, preface.

⁴⁷ Baxter to Alexander Pitcairne [sen.], 12 July 1673: DWL MS BC i. 185v (CCRB #911).

⁴⁸ Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, p. 41.

is *Not* to be Received than *what is*; which in the curbing of...the vaine attempts of audacious, arrogant wittes, is all ways the most needfull, and the honestest course.⁴⁹

It was Baxter's approach to tear down arrogance and error wherever he perceived it, and it is no wonder he offended so many people in the process. If the patient had cancer it needed to be removed, no matter how painful for him or distasteful for his physician.

Baxter's defence contains a fair measure of truth, but it does not go far enough in explaining his infatuation with controversy. The essential problem was one of talent and temperament. Even as sympathetic a commentator as George Fisher is forced to acknowledge Baxter's abysmal failure as a peacemaker. Baxter, admits Fisher, lacked "the practical wisdom which adapts means to ends... . In this attempt to secure a peace, he excited more contention than he quelled, and a great part of his life was spent in controversies of which he himself was the author".⁵⁰ Baxter's efforts were rendered counter-productive by the contentious inclinations of his own nature. He must be seen not as a hypocrite, but as a bundle of contradictions. Baxter was genuinely dismayed at the effect and the futility of controversy, but other inclinations of his temperament struggled for dominance. All too often Baxter's genuinely pacific desires were overcome by other more aggressive tendencies within his personality. The *Reliquiae Baxterianae* embodied his best intentions; Samuel Young's *Vindiciae Anti-Baxterianae* reflected the harsh and unavoidable reality.

The essential problem was that the inherent nature of controversy resonated with Baxter's own nature. "The Lord knows", he confessed in 1654, "that contending is distasteful to my soul, though my corrupt nature is too prone to it".⁵¹ He went even further in a 1658 letter to John Warner, still another author he had just offended,

⁴⁹ DWL MS BT v. 224v, item #177.

⁵⁰ Fisher, "Theology of Richard Baxter", p. 136. Ian Murray makes a similar point, "Richard Baxter - 'The Reluctant Puritan'?", p. 2.

⁵¹ Baxter, *Rich. Baxters Account*, preface.

claiming that “when I consider I have greater conflicts with myselfe than with all the world, it shameth me for grudginge at a little tryall from my Brethren.”⁵² Baxter carried on intense debates even in the recesses of his own mind; his private thoughts were absorbed in the issues of the day. It is no wonder that such inclinations spilled out onto the printed page or private sheet in a turmoil of continual controversy.

Furthermore, it was his “naturall temper”, he confessed, “to be earnest in speech, and when I write against an error, I am ready to thinke I should lay open the worst of it, and leave it naked... . And my judgment alloweth me much more this way, than any that I deale with will take well”.⁵³ In other words, Baxter simply could not help himself, his nature made him all too eager to enter the controversial fray, and once embroiled his language became personally vindictive and unnecessarily offensive. Again and again he protested that he had been entangled in the fabric of his own nature. “It is my grieffe”, he disclosed to John Warner, “that I can do no worke of God but somewhat of selfe is droppinge in”.⁵⁴ In 1658 he confessed his weakness to a sympathetic Abraham Pinchbecke. He explained that

mens suspicions and exceptions hath made me of late yeares speake more cautelously than heretofore, and perswaded me to forbear acquaintance the world with any of my conceits which are not agreeable...so I am sometime inclined to forbear hereafter to answer to any difficult Questions... . But yet I confess by the power of truth (if I mistake not) and an estimation of its interest above any other, I am strongly provoked to blab out any thinge, that I do confidently thinke to be true and weighty.⁵⁵

Baxter was irresistibly drawn in to fight for the truth. Like some latter-day Coriolanus he could not help but speak the truth as he saw it, and be “persecuted, hunted, reviled by many...because I cannot flatter”.⁵⁶ And as much as he might swear off controversy, he

⁵² Baxter to John Warner, 19 July 1658: DWL MS BC iv. 164v (CCRB #466).

⁵³ Baxter to John Humfrey, 13 March 1657/8: DWL MS BC i. 203r (CCRB #437).

⁵⁴ Baxter to John Warner, 19 July 1658: DWL MS BC iv. 164v (CCRB #466).

⁵⁵ Baxter to Abraham Pinchbecke, 12 October 16[5]8: DWL MS BC iv. 56r (CCRB #508).

⁵⁶ Baxter to [William Penn], [10 October 1675]: DWL MS BT vi. 333v, item #215 (CCRB #982).

continually returned like a moth to the bright flame of truth. When it came to defending what he believed was the truth, "I have no power to forbear".⁵⁷

What has all this to do with Antinomianism? It helps to explain why he became so embroiled in the Antinomian debate, and it accounts for the perseverance and the passion with which he sustained it. It is not the full explanation - there are additional factors that made his efforts in this controversy more heated than in others - but it is an essential beginning. Despite what Baxter would like his readers to believe, he was hardly "too indifferent [to] what Men hold", he could not easily "keep my Judgment to my self", and he never felt free to leave an Antinomian "to his own Opinion".⁵⁸ Instead, in all of these writings, he painted a picture of Antinomianism that brought out its darkest tones, he sketched in what was not there and he adopted the most unflattering angle. This was a fight for the truth as he saw it. Therefore, it is necessary to extract from his writings the error as he perceived it; it is important to uncover his portrait of the seventeenth-century Antinomian he so disliked.

Antinomianism in Theory

When Baxter wrote of Antinomianism he employed three types of imagery. He wrote of the "pillar and foundation" and "frame and fabricke" of Antinomianism.⁵⁹ He described its "heart, blood, spirits and soule".⁶⁰ Or he spoke in terms of root and branch.⁶¹ Therefore, his was a very structural view, which suggests not only the orderly

⁵⁷ Richard Baxter, *The Reduction of a Digressor: Or Rich. Baxter's Reply to Mr George Kendall's Digression in his Book against Mr Goodwin*, 1654, postscript.

⁵⁸ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 126.

⁵⁹ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, p. 164.

⁶⁰ DWL MS BT ii. 9r, item #21 (1).

⁶¹ For example, see Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxter's Confutation of a Dissertation For the Justification of Infidels*, 1654, epistle dedicatory. In *Rich. Baxters Apology*.

workings of his mind, but also the fact that he was describing what he believed to be a coherent and self-evident system. It also sat easily with his temperament: “my intellect abhorreth Confusion”, he explained; his “natural Inclination [was] to Subtilty and Accurateness”; and he was “an unfeigned lover of method”.⁶²

This Antinomian structure rested on the central pillar of strict imputation, an interpretation of the nature of Christ’s atonement which held that the elect actually suffered and obeyed in the Person of Christ. This was “the very master-pillar in the fabricke of Antinomianisme”, that the sins of the elect were strictly imputed to Christ, and that His righteousness was imputed to them.⁶³ He fulminated against

the root, the heart of all Antinomianism, from whence all the rest doth unavoidably follow: and that is the misunderstanding of the nature and use of Christs Death and Obedience, and thinking that *Christ obeyed or satisfied by suffering, or both, as in our Persons, so that the Law takes it, to all ends and uses, as done by our selves.*⁶⁴

Strict imputation was nothing less than “the very turning point to Antinomianism, and the very *Primum vivens and ultimum moriens*, the Heart of the whole System of their Doctrine”.⁶⁵ It was also, Baxter angrily exclaimed, the “desperatist Error that I know”.⁶⁶ He was drawn to condemn it repeatedly.⁶⁷

Strict imputation certainly was central to what he opposed, and in it he detected a host of unavoidable consequences. One of the most important was the “Antinomian fancy” that the elect were justified from eternity.⁶⁸ Strict imputation, lamented Baxter, “directly and unavoidably introduceth Justification before faith, or before we were

⁶² *Rel. Bax.*, I. 126, 127; Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, p. 3.

⁶³ Baxter to Richard Vines, 24 July 1650: DWL MS BC ii. 25r (CCRB #46).

⁶⁴ Baxter, *Confutation*, epistle dedicatory.

⁶⁵ Baxter to [John Tombes], 9 June 1651: Richard Baxter, *Of Justification: Four Disputations Clearing and amicably Defending the Truth*, 1658, p. 382 (CCRB #66).

⁶⁶ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 155v, item #199 (CCRB #74).

⁶⁷ For instance, see Richard Baxter, *An Unsavoury Volume of Mr Jo. Crandon’s Anatomized: or a Nosegay of the Choisest Flowers in that Garden*, 1654, p. 26, in *Rich. Baxters Apology*; Baxter, *Confutation*, epistle dedicatory, pp. 224, 321, *Confession of his Faith*, p. 266.

⁶⁸ Baxter, *Of Justification*, p. 334.

born”.⁶⁹ The Antinomians inferred this from God’s eternal decree to save the elect; the intention was as good as the act itself. “For ought I see”, Baxter mused, “God’s Eternal Decree is the beginning, middle and end of the Antinomians Theologie; It is almost their All”.⁷⁰ Since the elect acted in the Person of Christ on the cross, their justification must have been complete even then. And God must always have viewed the elect as righteous because to alter His view of them was to introduce change into an immutable God. Thus justification was an immanent act (flowing from God’s eternal nature) not a transient act (a decision involving change and time).⁷¹ This further implied that justification was an absolute, one-off event, rather than being progressively completed during the life of the believer.⁷²

Justification from eternity, then, became a touchstone of Antinomianism in Baxter’s mind. To destroy this one point was to destroy the whole system, he eagerly informed John Warren, who had questioned his *Aphorismes*.⁷³ And if “ever you would maintain the Doctrine of Christ”, he warned George Kendall, a London minister,

take heed of the Errours of the Antinomians; and as ever you would escape the snares of Antinomianism, take heed of these principal Articles of it following: ‘That...we are actually Pardoned, Justified, Reconciled and Adopted...before we were born, much more before we believe; yea that adoption and Remission of sin are immanent acts in God, and so are from eternity, even before any death of Christ, or efficacy of it...’ I say, take heed of these master-Points of Antinomianism.⁷⁴

Thus strict imputation and justification from eternity were Baxter’s key grievances against Antinomianism.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

⁷⁰ Baxter, *Confession of his Faith*, p. 290.

⁷¹ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp. 173-193.

⁷² Richard Baxter, *A Defence of Christ And Free Grace: Against the Subverters Commonly Called, Antinomian or Libertines: Who Ignorantly Blaspheme Christ on Pretence of Extolling Him*, 1690, pp. 16-17. In *Scripture Gospel Defended*.

⁷³ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 148v, item #199 (CCRB #74).

⁷⁴ Baxter, *Reduction of a Digressor*, p. 13.

But his disagreement did not end there. Drawing out further inferences, Baxter believed that the Antinomians vitiated the nature of the gospel. First, they taught that it was not a law. It was here, of course, that the label of Antinomian had its greatest relevance. The Antinomians were “Libertine deniers of the law of Christ”.⁷⁵ “These men deny the very being of this Gospel Act: They deny it to be either *Christ’s Law*, or *Covenant*, or *Grant*”.⁷⁶ This not only undermined the gospel as a law, but also Christ as a lawmaker.

They that in peevish opposition to others, tell us, That Christ made *no Law*, and that the *Gospel* is *not a Law*...do deny all our *Christianity* at once: For Christ is *not Christ*, if he be not the *King of the Church*; nor is he *King*, if he be not a *Lawgiver*; nor doth he *Rule* and *Judge*, if he have *no Law*.⁷⁷

The Antinomians believed that when Christ was involved in the process of conversion, He acted not as a king or lord, but only as a priest. They also claimed that the sinner needed only to accept Christ as priest, not as king, to be saved. In Baxter’s eyes this was as ineffectual as not accepting Christ at all. For “he that receives [Christ] only as Priest, and not as King doth not receive him as Christ... . A false Faith doth not justify: But to receive Christ only as a Priest, and not as King, is a false Faith”.⁷⁸ This, then, was “a doctrine of most desperate consequence, and not to be endured by Christians”.⁷⁹

So the Antinomians took the new covenant to be only a promise, and not a law. They also believed that the new covenant had no conditions. Indeed, since justification of the elect was settled from eternity it was no easy task to provide a place for conditions, unless the Arminian tenet of foreseen faith was accepted. Thus the

⁷⁵ Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxter’s Catholick Theologie: Plain, Pure, Peaceable: For Pacification Of the Dogmaticall Word-Warriours*, 1675, book I, part ii, p. 35.

⁷⁶ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Richard Baxter, *An End of Doctrinal Controversies Which have Lately Troubled the Churches By Reconciling Explication, Without Much Disputing*, 1690, p. 149.

⁷⁸ Richard Baxter, *The Substance of Mr. Cartwright’s Exceptions Considered*, 1675, p. 208. In *Treatise of Justifying Righteousness*.

⁷⁹ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 176r, item #199 (CCRB #74).

“antinomians say, that man can do nothing to his own salvation, but is merely passive: if God have justified Him before he was born, he shall be a justified person”.⁸⁰ Moreover, the Antinomians considered that conditions could not be consonant with the free gift of salvation.⁸¹ Baxter briskly dismissed this as the “grossest Antinomianism” and the Antinomian “dream”.⁸²

In particular, the Antinomians denied that obedience and faith were conditions of justification.⁸³ If the elect were justified from eternity it followed that faith could play no active part in their salvation. Instead, faith was the believer’s recognition of his justification *in foro conscientia*, in the sight of the conscience. Faith was simply to perceive what had always been true. The elect had been justified in God’s eyes from eternity, so faith was merely the opening of their own eyes to their own salvation.⁸⁴ Such an understanding made faith entirely passive in the work of salvation.⁸⁵

Baxter had several objections to this doctrine of justification *in foro conscientia*. “If The Justification by ffaith be that of Conscience then a man may be said to be his owne Justifyer and to pardon himselfe.”⁸⁶ For a man to be justified *in foro conscientia* was simply to believe that he was elect; this belief was the proof that he was elect. So a man’s justification in time depended on himself, and in that sense he redeemed himself. Baxter also appealed to his own experience. “I can speak experimentally but of my selfe”, he explained, “I never felt any certaine sentence or Axiome pronounced in my soule”, and yet he considered himself to have entered into a justified state.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ *Catholic Unity: Works*, IV. 658.

⁸¹ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, pp. 24-25.

⁸² Baxter, *Of Justification*, pp. 191, 218.

⁸³ Baxter, *Substance of Mr. Cartwright’s Exceptions Considered*, p. 296; Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 145r, item #199 (CCRB #74).

⁸⁴ Baxter, *Confutation*, p. 190.

⁸⁵ Baxter to [Anthony Burgess], 28 June 1650: Baxter, *Of Justification*, p. 206 (CCRB #43).

⁸⁶ Baxter to [George Lawson], 5 August 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 84r, item #197 (CCRB #72).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

So this sturdy trunk of strict imputation nourished some significant limbs of doctrine - free justification from eternity, passive faith, and unconditional salvation - and all were central to Baxter's conception of Antinomianism. The person who held to justification from eternity and an unconditional covenant was "an Antinomian though he do not know it"; and if Baxter agreed to strict imputation, "I would be an Antinomian tomorrow".⁸⁸ But these limbs also supported a number of more minor branches, which Baxter found no less objectionable. For example, he interpreted strict imputation to mean that the elect did not need to believe, repent and obey because Christ had already done that perfectly for them.⁸⁹ This was because Christ had paid the *Idem*, the exact debt which the Law demanded of the elect, rather than the *Tantundem*, a sacrifice of equal value which God accepted as satisfaction for sin. This doctrine removed the need for repentance and pardon, and "almost all Religion is overthrown at a blow".⁹⁰

The Antinomians also attacked the doctrine of sin. They denied its presence in the elect, even suggesting that there was never any sin to pardon. If Christ's righteousness really was strictly imputed "we could need no *pardon*; for he that is reputed to be *Innocent*, by fulfilling the Law, is reputed never to have sinned, by *omission* or *commission*: And he can have no *pardon* of *sin*, who hath *no sin* to be pardoned".⁹¹ This led the Antinomians to deny that sin was pardoned by degrees, upon repentance by the sinner,⁹² that afflictions in the lives of the elect were punishment for sin,⁹³ and that the sins of the elect were still punishable by death.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ DWL MS BT xiv. 2v, item #325.

⁸⁹ *Catholic Unity: Works*, IV. 658.

⁹⁰ Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, p. 80.

⁹¹ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I. ii. 59; Baxter to [George Lawson], 5 August 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 70v, item #197 (CCRB #72).

⁹² Baxter, *Confutation*, p. 241.

⁹³ Baxter, *Unsavoury Volume*, p. 38.

⁹⁴ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 148v, item #199 (CCRB #74).

Moreover, the Antinomians further “erroneously hold, that when a man is once justified, the continuance of his justification is Absolute, and hath no imposed conditions”.⁹⁵ Just as there were no conditions attached to the entrance of the elect into the state of justification, so there could be no conditions for the continuance of it. In Baxter’s experience it was only “gross Antinomians” who denied that a “*true believer*” could “*lose his Justification*”.⁹⁶

More seriously, though, Baxter lashed out at Antinomianism because it elevated the believer by making him his own redeemer, and it denigrated God by transforming Him into a lying sinner. No doubt enjoying the twists and turns of intensely theoretical debate, Baxter relentlessly exposed what seemed to him to be the logical implications of strict imputation.

That Doctrine is not tollerable which makes Man his own Redeemer, or to have suffered or satisfied for his own Sins: But such this seems therefore, &c. For if the Law say, that we satisfied in Christ, then in Law Sence, we satisfied for our own Sins, and consequently redeemed ourselves... . So that if the Law or Law-giver say, the Elect suffered in Christ; they must needs say, the elect satisfied in Christ, or rather paid the debt of the due punishment.⁹⁷

Not only were the elect made their own redeemers, they were made as righteous as Christ. “They feign Christ to have made such an Exchange with the Elect, as that having taken all their Sins, he hath given them all his Righteousness... . So that they are as perfectly Righteous as Christ himself, and so esteemed of God”.⁹⁸ Most importantly, the elect had always been so, from eternity, for

according to this Doctrine Men were justified before they were men, and acquitted from all Sin before they were born or had committed Sin, and so Sinners that were no Men and consequently no Sinners, were acquitted from Sin that was not, and consequently was no sin.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 24.

⁹⁶ Baxter, *Confession of his Faith*, p. 303.

⁹⁷ Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, pp. 76-77.

⁹⁸ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, pp. 77-78. See also Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I. ii. 59 for similar illogic.

In effect there was never any sin in the elect, because it could not be both Christ's and theirs at the same time.¹⁰⁰ To accept this logic was to wonder at the need for Christ's satisfaction at all.¹⁰¹

On the other side of the Antinomian coin was Christ, Who was by implication transformed into a sinner. The Antinomians affirmed that

all our sins, habitual and actual, positive and privitive, of commission and omission, became truly and properly Christs own sins: And so, that he was truly judged a hater and blasphemer of God and Holiness, and the greatest murderer, adulterer, thief, lyar, perjured Traytor in all the World, the sins of all the Elect being truly His sins.¹⁰²

Yet the wickedness of this abhorrent system, in Baxter's eyes, did not end there. The Antinomians who "make this Imputation to be before the Incarnation, make God to make Himself this great Sinner; that is, Christ while he was meer God: And so make us a wicked God".¹⁰³ That conclusion could be reached by other means. Antinomian doctrine made God out to be a liar by esteeming the elect to have obeyed and repented when they had not, and to be righteous when they were not.¹⁰⁴ It also made God the author of iniquity, which was demonstrated most fully when God transformed His own Son into the worst of sinners.¹⁰⁵

In the end Baxter complained that this system of Antinomianism produced ingratitude. He made this very clear in a long letter to John Warren.

I confess, sir, I abhorre the sawcyness and ingratitude of Libertines (commonly called Antinomians) who dare charge God with selling his pardon and salvation, if he do but require them to believe, and love him, and sincerely obey him, for the future, as the Condition of their full enjoyment of them! ...[T]hese men dare tell him to his face: Thou dost not offer us thy Grace freely! This is buying it, yea though all their strength to the performance of this Condition be merely from God!¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ DWL MS BT ii. 9r, item # 21 (1).

¹⁰² Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 10. See also pp. 3-4, and *Catholick Theologie*, I. ii. 66.

¹⁰³ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Baxter, *A Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification, Delivered in many Books, By Richard Baxter: In many Propositions, and the Solutions of 50 Controversies about it*, 1690, prologue. In *Scripture Gospel Defended*.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 3. See also p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 177v, item #199 (CCRB #74).

Baxter offered this condemnation to expose what he considered to be a selfish and self-exalting doctrine. Based upon the foundation of strict imputation, and flowing on to justification from eternity and many other errors, Antinomianism was for Baxter a theological system out of focus with God's holiness and man's sinfulness, out of step with current interpretation, and out of balance in its exaltation of free grace alone. As a theory it was unbiblical, untenable and utterly objectionable.

All of this explains why Baxter's "naturall temper" rose to the challenge of Antinomianism. Deep inclinations within his personality drove him to oppose this doctrine that, to him at least, so clearly undermined the truth.

My apprehensions of the danger of that Doctrine, commonly known by the name of *Antinomian*, or *Libertine*, are such as will not suffer me to make light of it, or patiently to sit still in silence while the Gospel is subverted by it, and the souls of poor people enticed to perdition. I confidently think that the main substance of the Gospel is by too necessary consequence overthrown by their mistakes, and that our difference with most of them about the Law, is but the smaller part.¹⁰⁷

The first reason, then, why Baxter so vigorously opposed the Antinomians is simple: they challenged his conception of the truth, they aroused his controversial inclinations.

But Baxter's hostile interpretation of Antinomian doctrine was neither fair nor accurate. His description was a polemical construct, which did not reflect reality. Much of his description was correct, but his mistakes are revealing. To begin with, he could, and did, produce evidence from the Antinomians' own writings to prove parts of his case. For example, in one passage in which he closely matched Baxter's description, John Saltmarsh declared that justification came before (passive) faith and repentance, that sin was completely removed from the believer (with no need to pray for pardon) and that good works were performed "not that we may be *saved*, but because we are

¹⁰⁷

Baxter, *Confutation*, apologetical preface.

saved".¹⁰⁸ These assertions, however, were clumped together in just four pages of a 333-page book. Baxter was prone to extracting evidence like this in isolation, and out of context. In his 1690 *Defence of Christ*, as another example, he quoted accurately, but selectively, from Tobias Crisp.¹⁰⁹ Baxter construed his evidence to assert that Crisp's doctrine hardened "Malignants in Impenitency", but upon closer inspection Crisp was stressing the importance of good works, and denied that his doctrine was "the way to destroy all righteousness".¹¹⁰ Still, it has to be said that the Antinomians did hold to strict imputation, one-off, absolute and unconditional justification before passive faith, and the total forgiveness of sin in God's sight.

On other points of their doctrine, though, Baxter was entirely mistaken. For example, there was "a doctrine of *holinesse* in the Gospel", Saltmarsh proclaimed, "as well as *grace* and *love*; and there are *commands* for *obedience*, as well as *tydings* of *forgiveness*". The old law had been transformed, he continued,

it is now under the *Gospel* a law of *life*, *spirit*, and *glory*; it is a *Law* in the hand of *Christ*... . Thus, what ever *doctrine* of *holinesse* is in the *new Testament*, we are to receive it, because it is now the *doctrine* of him who is the *Lord*, *Jesus Christ*, the *Lord* as well as *Jesus Christ*, and one who *commands* as well as *saves*.¹¹¹

Baxter was wrong to say the Antinomians destroyed law and deposed Christ as a law-giver. He was also wrong to say that the Antinomians denied the presence of sin in the believer. They accepted the persistence of sin, only saying that God no longer saw it in His children.¹¹² Indeed, their doctrine was constructed to aid the believer in coping with, and fighting against, its corrupting presence.

¹⁰⁸ Saltmarsh, *Sparkles of Glory*, pp. 190-193.

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, "A further Advertisement to the Reader".

¹¹⁰ Crisp, *Fourteene Sermons*, pp. 300-315, 298.

¹¹¹ Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, pp. 150, 151.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 129; Crisp, *Fourteene Sermons*, pp. 311-312.

The further Baxter drew out his implications, the more wild and inaccurate they became. For this reason contemporaries and historians alike have accused him of attacking a straw man.¹¹³ For all his strained logic, the Antinomians never contemplated a lying, sinful God, nor did they argue the eternal perfection of the believer. Their doctrine did not make man his own redeemer; their intention was to exalt Christ alone as saviour. And Baxter's accusation of ingratitude was misguided. The essence of the Antinomians' convictions - as Baxter well knew - was that works were performed from life, not for it. Far from being unthankful, gratitude was the driving force behind their obedience.

No doubt the inaccuracies in Baxter's treatment of Antinomianism come down to a mixture of jaundiced misunderstanding and the usual rhetoric of seventeenth-century theological debate. Seen in this context, it was not unusual for Baxter to assume that the true meaning of ideas could be logically inferred, without that inference matching the expressed intentions of the author he opposed. What is so telling, though, is a comparison between his treatment of Antinomianism and his handling of Roman Catholic soteriology. The context of controversy for both is the same, but in his presentation of Catholic soteriology Baxter proved that he could rise above the malice and misinformation of his age. Hans Boersma shrewdly observes that without actually embracing Roman Catholicism, Baxter had secret sympathies for its soteriology. While he devoted many books to denouncing popery, "there is a remarkable lacuna in these polemical writings: Baxter rarely deals with soteriological issues. When he does bring

¹¹³ For instance, see Young, *Vindiciae Anti-Baxterianae*, p. 130; Packer, "Redemption and Restoration", p. 269. Thomas Hill, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Gilbert Clerke, an admirer of Baxter's, both thought his use of the label was mysterious and inappropriate. Tho[mas] Hill to Baxter, 12 September 1653: DWL MS BC v. 237r (CCRB #133); Gilbert C[lerke] to Baxter, [c.summer 1681]: DWL MS BC iii. 20r-21r (CCRB #1071).

them up, he considerably minimizes the differences between Roman Catholic and Protestant positions".¹¹⁴ Baxter treated Catholic soteriology with surprising generosity: surprising because most of his contemporaries were incapable of such impartiality, and because such generosity was utterly absent from his handling of Antinomian soteriology.

In 1676, for example, Baxter castigated John Reynolds - a nonconformist and former member of Baxter's Worcestershire Association¹¹⁵ - for misunderstanding Catholics on the issue of merit.

I conclude again intreating you, to read the Papists doctrine fully before you judge what it is; And let no protestant (lest it corrupt them with false censures) nor no Papist (lest it harden them against us) ever heare you say that the Church of Rome, or the Generality of most of the Popish Doctors do hold merits as without Christ and his merits presupposed...or as excluding Gods free guift, when I have proved to you the contrary, even out of the Council of Trent, and your reading them will tell you much more.¹¹⁶

Baxter was not deceived by the common prejudice of his contemporaries, and his efforts at accuracy and honesty are astounding. Elsewhere he warned that Protestants "must not untruly fasten on [Catholics] any Errour which they hold not, nor put a false sence on their words, though we may find many Protestants that so charge them; nor may we charge that on the Party which is held but by some whom others contradict."¹¹⁷ Baxter made no attempt at all to sensationalise Catholic soteriology for polemical ends, he refused to exploit the pronouncements of the fringe in order to discredit the majority, and he was more than willing to defend the Catholics against Protestant misunderstanding.

¹¹⁴ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 324.

¹¹⁵ This was an association of local ministers designed by Baxter to cut across denominational boundaries and to discuss common theological and pastoral issues. See below, pp. 218-219.

¹¹⁶ Baxter to John Reynolds, 20 February 1675[/6]: DWL MS BC ii. 49r (CCRB #992).

¹¹⁷ Richard Baxter, *Against the Revolt to A Foreign Jurisdiction, Which would be to England its Perjury, Church-Ruine, and Slavery*, 1691, p. 533.

In doing so he was being consistent with general principles he offered elsewhere. In his *Treatise of Knowledge and Love Compared* he lamented the danger of ill-informed and barely deserved labels; he decried charges based on hearsay or “a few sentences or scraps collected out of their writings by their adversaries, contrary to the very scope of the whole discourse or context”; and he condemned “false judging...especially in the controversies of predestination, grace and free-will, how few do we hear that know what they talk against!”¹¹⁸ In *Cain and Abel Malignity*, published in the same year, Baxter denounced the use of “some contemptuous, scornful nickname; which, though it be of no signification, is as effectual as the truest charge”.¹¹⁹ The principles by which Baxter conducted soteriological debate, therefore, were ones of honesty, accuracy and generosity. They led him to view Roman Catholic soteriology with a relatively friendly eye.

But these principles were totally abandoned in his treatment of Antinomianism. Baxter constantly quoted only the worst extracts from Tobias Crisp, ignoring the “scope of the whole discourse or context”. He eagerly snapped up the more extreme pronouncements of the fringe to discredit the whole. He constantly employed the nickname of Antinomian or Libertine to describe what was really the doctrine of justification by faith alone without works. And he continually presented that doctrine in the worst possible light, interpreting it in the worst possible way, and drawing out the worst possible implications and conclusions. In dealing with Antinomianism he set aside his usual fair insight and accurate honesty. This is clear evidence that Antinomianism touched a raw nerve in Baxter, that it played on a fundamental level of fears which agitated his fretful mind. “Irrational” is a dangerous word to use, but the

¹¹⁸ *Knowledge and Love Compared: Works*, IV. 587.
¹¹⁹ *Cain and Abel Malignity: Works*, IV. 533.

abandonment of these settled principles and the sheer passion with which Baxter responded to Antinomianism indicate that it brushed up against issues deeper than just theological interpretation.

Still, it was essentially a theological interpretation that provoked Baxter to respond to Antinomianism. Accurate or not, the long list of his writings against it signals the profound effect it had on him. Nothing exposes this influence more clearly than the centrepiece of his campaign against Antinomianism, the *Aphorismes of Justification*. On the face of it, the book's importance is not easy to detect. It appears only to put forward a series of eighty propositions (aphorisms) regarding justification and sanctification, with an explanation following each one. It also contains a substantial appendix in which Baxter responded to the criticisms of a friend, to whom he had lent the manuscript. Innocuous enough, but the book was founded on a principle that Baxter enunciated only later: "because the Antinomians deny it, let us prove it".¹²⁰ At every turn, then, the *Aphorismes* contradicted the Antinomians' doctrine. It is the mirror image of his polemical construct of Antinomianism, so it demonstrates how deeply Baxter's conception of the Antinomian system affected his own soteriological understanding.

The Aphorismes of Justification (1649)

Richard Baxter has been notoriously difficult to pin down.¹²¹ Few would not share a

¹²⁰ Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, p. 398. The manuscript of this book was probably written during the 1650s (see Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 333-338).

¹²¹ N. H. Keeble explains why in *Richard Baxter. Puritan Man of Letters*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 23-24. In addition see Packer, "Redemption and Restoration", pp. i-ii, and Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 21-22, for the same in relation to Baxter's doctrinal position.

sense of empathy with Joan Webber, who declares that Baxter's

own self-division and the fragmentation of his world force him to reach out in opposite directions. He could not make a choice between prelacy and separatism, Arminianism and Calvinism, or justification by faith and by works... By instinct a controversialist, he set his heart on peace; a monastic, he eventually chose to marry; a great writer of books, he worried that men defeat their own ends by excessive publishing.¹²²

There is a sense in which this "utterly self-divided man striving even against his own nature for unity and wholeness" needs to be accepted as he is.¹²³ To manipulate him into one camp, to choose between opposing poles, would be to squeeze him into an unnatural mould. It is, in other words, imperative that Baxter's historians recognise the complexity of the man.

Yet at the same time it is possible to extract some reasonably clear and consistent outlines from the muddle. Baxter's theology was more than "meer Gallimophery, Hodg-podg Divinity", as Samuel Young so unkindly put it.¹²⁴ Most recently, Hans Boersma has uncovered the order in Baxter's system. In doing so he might have applied easy labels to Baxter's theology, but he avoids such oversimplification. His recognition of two keys which unlock Baxter's system - God's will as *Rector* and God's will as *Dominus* - is extremely useful.¹²⁵ And in its own way C. F. Allison's older work also gives shape to the compulsions at work in Baxter's theology. In his book Allison studiously avoids labels such as "Calvinism" and "Arminianism", and instead presents Baxter as a key figure in the rise of Protestant moralism.¹²⁶ This is wise. Labels are unreliable, but trends are more substantial. The doctrine that Baxter laid out in his *Aphorismes* is difficult to define but undoubtedly

¹²² Joan Webber, "Richard Baxter: The Eye of the Hurricane", in *The Eloquent "I". Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose*, Madison, 1968, pp. 118-119.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹²⁴ Young, *Vindiciae Anti-Baxterianae*, p. 111.

¹²⁵ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 8.

¹²⁶ Allison, *Rise of Moralism*.

moralistic, and it was certainly in line with the rise of moralism in seventeenth-century English theology.

It is dangerous, then, to discard one label only to suggest another. Even so, since Baxter's soteriological system was the opposite of Antinomianism it would not be improper to call his theology "anti-Antinomian". The double negative suggests that Baxter was a "nomian", and such a label looks rather odd, but he has been called a "Neonomian".¹²⁷ It would also confirm Allison's portrait of a man contributing to the rise of moralism in response to the anti-moralism of the Antinomians. While not ignoring other influences, this label recognises that the characteristic thrust of all Baxter's doctrinal and pastoral efforts was to block the way forward for Antinomianism.

This is easily demonstrated by an assessment of the *Aphorismes of Justification*. At the heart of this book lay Baxter's twofold distinction between God's will as *Dominus* and God's will as *Rector*. As *Dominus* God ordered everything according to His secret and insuperable will. Baxter called this God's "Will of Purpose". It focused on events, and ordered them as God saw fit. His secret decrees of "Predestination, Election, Reprobation or Preterition" were contained within it. This will of purpose was absolute and unconditional; and so was God's promise of justification to the elect.¹²⁸

Thus far the Antinomians would have found themselves in happy agreement, but Baxter added to this God's "Will of Precept", or His "Legislative Will", which focused on duty. The promises made according to this will were conditional, and those conditions were revealed, not secret. The gospel was included in this; it was not

¹²⁷ Isaac Chauncey, *Neonomianism Unmask'd: Or, The Ancient Gospel Pleaded, Against the Other, Called A New Law Or A New Gospel*, 1692, I. 10. See also, J. I. Packer, *Among God's Giants. The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, Eastbourne, 1993, p. 207.

¹²⁸ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp. 2-11. See also the appendix, pp. 41-45 for further explication of this distinction.

absolute, conditions were attached and duty was required.¹²⁹ Moreover, it was not offered only to the elect, but to all people.¹³⁰ The gospel invitation was open to all, but those who fulfilled the terms of God's legislative will and those who were elected under God's will of purpose would in the end be exactly the same.¹³¹ Thus nothing of God's unconditional promise to the elect was lost, while a place for conditions was preserved.

This meant that the gospel was a law. It set forth conditions, it demanded duty, and it threatened death to those who did not obey. In fact, there were now two laws, the new and the old. "Not that Christ doth absolutely null or repeal the old Covenant", Baxter argued, it "still continueth to command, prohibit, promise, and threaten. So that the sins even of the justified are still breaches of that Law, and are threatened and cursed thereby".¹³² To transgress Christ's new law was also to transgress the moral law.¹³³ This had been relaxed, but not repealed, and the curse on sin remained.¹³⁴ It would only cease once final justification was complete, after death. Nothing could be more "anti-Antinomian".

To the Antinomians, Christ was all in salvation; it was His work, His obedience, His grace. Baxter, on the other hand, was careful to circumscribe the work of Christ, which allowed him to limit the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers. Baxter argued that Christ fulfilled only the conditions of the old covenant, not the new one. The first required perfect obedience; this is what Christ provided, what was imputed to

¹²⁹ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp. 2-11.

¹³⁰ The question of universal redemption does not intrude much into the *Aphorismes*, since Baxter expected soon to publish a treatise in answer to it (*Aphorismes*, postscript). For a discussion of the date of composition for that work, *Universal Redemption*, which was finally published after Baxter's death, see Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, appendix A, pp. 333-338.

¹³¹ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp. 197-198.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 154.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 80. Baxter later regretted his use of the word "curse". See *Unsavory Volume*, pp. 23-29, and Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 127-129.

believers, and what Baxter called "legal righteousness".¹³⁵ But to avail himself of Christ's work in terms of the old law, the sinner had to fulfil the conditions of the new. A second type of righteousness - "evangelical righteousness" - was also required.¹³⁶ This was a sincere but imperfect performance of the gospel conditions, primarily faith.¹³⁷ Christ could not have satisfied the conditions of both covenants, because if so everyone would be saved; the offer was made universally and there would be no conditions left unmet.¹³⁸ Therefore, Christ's legal righteousness was only imputed to the person who had first provided his own evangelical righteousness.¹³⁹ This was the heart of Baxter's moralism.

Baxter's understanding of the imputation of Christ's righteousness was, then, the opposite to that of the Antinomians. They held that Christ believed and repented strictly for the elect, with the effect that His faith and obedience were essentially their own. But Baxter confined this imputation to the terms of the old covenant, and demanded that each person provide righteousness of his own in terms of the new covenant. Moreover, in paying the debt owed by sinners to the old law Baxter believed that Christ paid only the *Tantundem*, an amount of equal value which God accepted as satisfaction, and not the *Idem*, exactly what the Law required, which was what the Antinomians asserted.¹⁴⁰ There could be no justification before faith here. Each stage of justification was only ever complete once the conditions had been performed.¹⁴¹ Such was the importance of

¹³⁵ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp. 100-101.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-111.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-31, 63.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 196, 311-312.

Baxter's conviction on this point that he "developed his theory of justification in direct opposition to the notion that justification precedes faith".¹⁴²

Since God's legislative will focused on duty, the conditions of that revealed will were bound to fall within the sphere of obedience. "Our Evangelicall Righteousness... consisteth in our own actions of Faith and Gospel Obedience".¹⁴³ It is extremely significant that Baxter referred to faith as an action; the Antinomians strenuously maintained that faith was entirely passive. For Baxter, "Faith is the fulfilling of the conditions of the New Covenant, therefore it is our Righteousness in relation to that Covenant".¹⁴⁴ It was the act of faith that justified.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, faith comprised several acts, not just one, which reflected the diversity of faculties of the soul.¹⁴⁶ Essentially, faith consisted in three acts: assent (of the intellect), consent (of the will) and moral sincerity (proved in actions).¹⁴⁷ Faith involved the whole person, not just the intellect. The passive faith of the Antinomians was impossible here.

Baxter denied that this understanding of faith amounted to a doctrine of works. He freely admitted that the conditions of justification could only be performed with the aid of God's grace. He objected to the Antinomians, "those men [who] erroneously think, that nothing is a condition, but what is to be performed by our own strength".¹⁴⁸ He was also cautious in his use of the word "merit", given its Roman Catholic overtones. In the proper sense he was not arguing for merit, because the believer's works in themselves had no value. In another sense, though, these works were

¹⁴² Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 136.

¹⁴³ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 247-248.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91. Baxter does not mention the Antinomians explicitly, but he had just referred to John Saltmarsh, the foremost of "those men".

meritorious, simply because God had promised to reward them.¹⁴⁹ And the inclusion of conditions did not, he protested, detract from the efficacy of Christ's atoning work or the worth of free grace, nor did they add anything to the moral value of Christ's death.¹⁵⁰ After all, Christ came to fulfil the Law, not the Gospel.¹⁵¹ Baxter made his main concern very clear; "Not that we can perform these Conditions without Grace: (for without Christ we can do nothing:) But that he enableth us to perform them our selves; and doth not himself repent, beleieve, love Christ, obey the Gospel for us, as he did satisfie the Law for us".¹⁵²

The elect, then, performed the conditions only by grace, yet even here Baxter was determined to emphasise human responsibility and endeavour. He believed that under the terms of His will of purpose God would insuperably and irresistibly bring the elect to salvation. But Baxter also put great store in the power of "moral suasion" as the tool by which God exercised His rectorial government (His will of precept). It was a preservative of human responsibility in sin and God's use of means in salvation. For this reason, Boersma explains, "Baxter's writings do not emphasize the primacy of the work of the Spirit and the mere passive role of man in receiving the first impression [of faith] on the soul".¹⁵³ They certainly did not - although, significantly, some did more than others - because Baxter did not want to offer any encouragement to those of Antinomian inclinations.

[B]ecause of Baxter's continual stress on moral suasion instead of on the supernatural aspect of conversion, and because of the attention he gives to the freedom of the will and the possibility of preparation for special grace it becomes more difficult to retain the primacy of the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁵³ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 346.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Baxter could not say whether a person might receive enough grace savingly to believe, and yet not do so, but he did imply that special grace was dispensed when common grace was used well.¹⁵⁵ Despite the ambiguity, it is clear that Baxter was not about to give any room to passivity and irresistibility at the expense of duty and responsibility.

Therefore, even the elect had conditions to fulfil, and the chief of them was faith. Baxter was very specific about the object of saving faith. He asserted that "Christ as a Saviour onely, or in respect of his Priestly Office onely, is not the object of justifying Faith; but that Faith doth as really and immediately Receive him as King: and in so doing, Justifie".¹⁵⁶ Christ was revealed and offered in all His offices by Scripture.¹⁵⁷ To receive Him merely as priest or saviour was not to receive Him in a truly justifying way.¹⁵⁸ Here again, Baxter was deliberately blocking the Antinomians who held that faith in Christ as saviour was sufficient. Not so for Baxter. It was crucial to his political method that it have a political office at its apex.¹⁵⁹

The Antinomians might have choked at Baxter's understanding of the role of faith in justification, but they would certainly have opposed the inclusion of "Gospel Obedience" within it. Baxter argued that faith was the principal condition of the new covenant, but that there were a number of duties implied by it. He illustrated this with the example of a galley slave who was promised his freedom if he took a certain man for his master. The act of consent implied the necessity of leaving the galley, following his master and doing whatever he requested.¹⁶⁰ So too, faith included duties such as esteeming Christ above all, persevering, praying for forgiveness and the humbling of the

¹⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 156-159.

¹⁵⁶ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 255.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 257.

¹⁵⁹ This was reflected in *ibid.*, p. 256.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

flesh.¹⁶¹ In this sense works did justify, in subordination to faith,¹⁶² and, according to that great stumbling block, Matthew 25, “the great Judgment, will be according to our Works”.¹⁶³ Baxter may have protested that these conditions amounted only to a pepper corn, but it still proved too hot for many to swallow.¹⁶⁴

Baxter’s assault on Antinomianism in his *Aphorismes* was relentless. He carried on to argue that justification was not one absolute act. Instead, he distinguished three types, or stages, within it.¹⁶⁵ The first was constitutive justification, which was a conformity of the believer to the stipulations of the gospel covenant. This was necessary because a “legal title we must have before we can be justified; and there must be somewhat in our selves to prove that title, or else all men should have equal right”.¹⁶⁶ This is where preparation for grace slotted in. The second distinction was sentential justification. This was the actual sentence by God the Judge that a person was justified. Baxter believed that when Scripture talked of justification by faith it was primarily referring to this, which “is *in foro dei*, and not *in foro conscientia* primarily”.¹⁶⁷ This was completed not at conversion, but after the death and resurrection of the believer. The final distinction was executive justification, which was simply the execution of the sentence and actual liberation from the penalty. This was also completed after death, not before it.

Therefore, Baxter’s understanding of justification was worlds apart from that of the Antinomians. First, the “effects of Redemption undertaken, could not be upon a

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 240-242. In addition, see pp. 235-236.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 153. This, of course, is the implication that lies behind Boersma’s choice of title (see *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 24).

¹⁶⁵ See Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 90-91 for a full discussion of these distinctions. I am grateful to Boersma for his analysis here.

¹⁶⁶ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 95.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

subject not yet existent, and so no subject, though it might be for them".¹⁶⁸ The elect and the reprobate stood in exactly the same position, even if the elect were "differenced in God's decree".¹⁶⁹ How could the elect be objects of God's wrath if this were not true?¹⁷⁰ Moreover, justification was not one absolute act, but consisted of several parts, so it could not be complete at conversion - it was certainly not finished before faith or in eternity past - but was fulfilled only after death. Thus Baxter's conception of justification was one of continuity and progression. "For even when we do perform the Condition, yet still the Discharge remains conditional till we have quite finished our performance. For it is not one instantaneous Act of beleieving which shall quite discharge us; but a continued Faith".¹⁷¹ In each of its steps justification was perfect, yet while still in this world the saint was not fully free, and the elect moved only by "degrees toward our full and perfect Justification at the last Judgment".¹⁷²

This emphasis on progression can be seen, for instance, in the issue of forgiveness. Baxter maintained that a sin could only be pardoned once it had come into being, that is, once it had been committed.¹⁷³ Therefore, repentance and a fresh appeal to the atoning work of Christ were required each time the believer committed a sin.¹⁷⁴ This emphasis on repentance was "a corrective to the antinomian idea that pardon was given automatically and eternally through the merit of Christ, eliminating the necessity for repentance".¹⁷⁵ Perseverance, to take another example, was the continuation of a

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁷⁵ W. Lawrence Highfill, "Faith and Works in the Ethical Theory of Richard Baxter", PhD thesis, Duke University, 1954, p. 79. Quoted in Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 296.

state of faith, and was as necessary to final justification as the first act of faith itself.¹⁷⁶ Thus the believer himself had a substantial part to play in the sustenance of justification. In summary, "Justification is not a momentous Act, begun and ended immediately upon our Believing: but a continued Act; which though it be in its kind compleate from the first, yet it is still in doing, till the finall Justification at the Judgement day".¹⁷⁷ Unlike Antinomianism, this encouraged the believer's perseverance in sound, Christian practice.

In the end Baxter was convinced that his was the more truthful and useful system. Nothing illustrated this more than the issue of assurance. In the wake of the Reformation, English Christians were left largely without that sense of security which the Roman Catholic practice of confession could bring. Moreover, the infusion into English Christianity of the Calvinist distinction between the elect and the damned raised the significance and concern that was bound up in this burning issue.¹⁷⁸ Baxter gave the believer something tangible to hold on to. Assurance could be gained by "producing our Faith and Gospel-Obedience...And so is it that our own graces and duties may be properly our comfort".¹⁷⁹ It is possible to sense his satisfaction at being able to offer this "practically useful observation", against the insidious and misguided whisperings of "Mr Saltmarsh".¹⁸⁰

This comment highlights one of the most important aspects of the *Aphorismes*, it was "practically useful". It is undeniable that in setting out his own soteriology Baxter was seeking to preserve the truth, but he was also trying to do much more than that. It is

¹⁷⁶ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 283.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁷⁸ Sampson, "Laxity and Liberty", p. 99.

¹⁷⁹ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 204.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

easy enough to overlook the fact that right at the heart of the system he set out in his *Aphorismes*, Baxter enshrined a place for the practice of Christianity.¹⁸¹ With his twofold emphasis on God's secret and revealed will, Baxter carved out for duty a place equal to that of election itself; he continually emphasised human responsibility in the use of grace; and he made sustained obedience a condition of the new covenant. On one level he wrote the book to counter the errors of the Antinomians; on another level it was designed to prevent the disastrous effect their doctrine could have on faithful Christian practice.

Antinomianism in Practice

Baxter exposed the heart of his objection to the practical implications of Antinomianism in a letter to John Warren: "where there is no Law, there can be no obedience". This suggested an obvious paraphrase, where there is Antinomianism, there can be no obedience. "If Christ as Lord-Redeemer have not a peculiar Law", Baxter continued, "then there is no peculiar kind of Obedience due to him as such... . That doctrine which would take men off from their peculiar obedience to Christ as Redeemer is not tollerable among Christians".¹⁸² Baxter made much the same point to John Wallis, a well-known Oxford professor. "If you take not the Law of Grace to be indeed a Law, no wonder if you see no necessity of a Righteousness in relation to it".¹⁸³ Antinomianism, then, destroyed obedience. It was not an accidental effect; it was the product of malicious intent.¹⁸⁴ The inevitable result of their doctrine was to "destroy the true principles and

¹⁸¹ Boersma also recognises this, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 173, 225, 256, 258.

¹⁸² Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 84, item #199 (CCRB #74).

¹⁸³ DWL MS BT ii. 20v, item #21(1).

¹⁸⁴ George Hopkins, *Salvation from Sinne by Jesus Christ*, 1655, [Baxter's] preface.

motives of holiness and obedience".¹⁸⁵ In every way, and from every angle, Antinomianism was a doctrinal system that militated against practical Christianity.

To begin with, strict imputation removed the need for obedience. Of the Antinomian opinions that

Christ did either satisfye, or Actively Obey, or both in our person...or that God doth so Impute to us his perfect Obedience, as to esteeme [us] as having done it ourselves or that it should have all the uses and effects for us, as it would have had if we had done it; I say, These assertions...discharge man from the Duty of Obedience.¹⁸⁶

If Christ perfectly obeyed in the place of the elect, their own obedience - or disobedience - became irrelevant.¹⁸⁷ The Antinomians saw duties as contributing in no way to their salvation; works were merely the remnant of a discarded and outdated obligation to the law.¹⁸⁸ There simply was no necessity or motivation to live a life of obedience, or so it seemed to Baxter.

He could also condemn other more peripheral Antinomian opinions as destructive to obedience. Here the problem was usually a lack of adequate motivation or compulsion. For example, the Antinomian doctrine that faith accepted Christ merely as priest could result only in "the lessening of mens Obedience to Christ".¹⁸⁹ This was, of course, linked to their belief that the gospel was not in any sense a law, "*ergo* Christ Doth but teach and princes Command: *ergo* it is no sin to disobey him".¹⁹⁰ And they "are unlike to be good Preachers of Christ's Law, who maintain that he hath no Law: And there can be no sin against it, nor expectation of being judged by it, if we have none".¹⁹¹ Furthermore, if sin was emptied of its relevance, and if the possibility of

¹⁸⁵ *Life of Faith: Works*, III. 687. See also *Poor Man's Family Book: Works*, IV. 240, where Baxter made the same objection.

¹⁸⁶ DWL MS BT ii. 9r, item #21 (1).

¹⁸⁷ Baxter to Richard Vines, 24 July 1650: DWL MS BC ii. 25r (CCRB #46).

¹⁸⁸ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 125r, item #199 (CCRB #74).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, vi. 176r.

¹⁹⁰ Baxter to Thomas Hill, 8 March [1652]: DWL MS BC iii. 272v (CCRB #81).

¹⁹¹ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I. ii. 42.

punishment for that sin was removed, then the believer's inclinations to obedience must surely decline. Indeed, it appeared to Baxter that Antinomianism had no great place either for fear or thankfulness, two powerful compulsions for a life of obedience.

Its teaching on assurance was equally lacking. The Antinomians argued that Christians should simply trust God with their soul, and never question their faith.¹⁹² They should certainly not look for any marks of their salvation in any works or duties, since those efforts could only ever be imperfect.¹⁹³ Instead they needed simply to believe that Christ died for them, because such belief (justification *in foro conscientia*) was only granted to the elect.¹⁹⁴ Even the person who committed the grossest sin should not question his justification,¹⁹⁵ because to doubt this was to doubt Christ's perfect work.¹⁹⁶ Baxter was mortified at such a reckless practice. It was only good for the bad, and only bad for the good.

Hereby they destroy the assurance and comfort of most (if not almost all) true Christians in the world; because they have not that inspiration or certain inward word of assurance, that they are Elect and Justified. I have known very few that said they had it... Hereby the Ungodly are dangerously tempted to damning presumption, and security; while, if they do but confidently believe they are Elect and Justified, they are quieted in Sin.¹⁹⁷

Once again their doctrine of assurance undermined obedience, in that duties had no useful part to play. Belief was all, and (apparently) the diligent practice of Christianity was unnecessary and irrelevant.

Yet Antinomianism did more than drain the life of practical Christianity. Baxter was convinced that it militated against salvation itself, and so threatened to unravel the whole fabric of Christianity. It did this by destroying the means by which God brought the elect to salvation. If the elect had been justified from eternity then their salvation

¹⁹² *Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience: Works*, II. 967.

¹⁹³ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 181v, item #199 (CCRB #74).

¹⁹⁴ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁵ *Catholic Unity: Works*, IV. 658.

¹⁹⁶ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 28.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

was a *fait accompli*, which God would reveal to their consciences without any call to action on their part. Means were irrelevant. For Baxter, though, means were the necessary steps that people must take towards salvation. To remove them was to deny all possibility of salvation. The whole work of redemption was apparently at stake.

This is why Baxter could say that the Antinomians “directly fight against all means Salvation, by telling them, that they ought to do no duty inward or outward, as a means of their Salvation, lest it be against *Christ* and *Free Grace* which saveth them”.¹⁹⁸

Antinomian doctrines

make Christs Death void and overthrow his satisfaction, and discharge men from the Duty of Obedience, and from Repenting and Praying for Pardon, and being beholden to God or Christ for pardon, and being Thankfull for it, and from all feare of Sin or danger, and so from all meanes to attaine Salvation.¹⁹⁹

Their opinion of passive faith made “the meanes of Grace to be of no use”, and their denial of active faith removed an essential condition of salvation.²⁰⁰ Thus the ungodly were “quieted” in their sin and “dangerously tempted to damning presumption”.²⁰¹ The unconverted elect were encouraged not to pray for salvation, because they were never in an unsaved state.²⁰² And on the issue of perseverance the “certainty of the end, supposeth the certainty of the means”, yet the Antinomians’ absolute certainty of the end inevitably caused them “to use the means but negligently”.²⁰³ Once again this threatened salvation, which was not complete until the race had been run. Ultimately, Antinomianism “would drive out all true Religion from the World, and harden all the

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 43.

¹⁹⁹ DWL MS BT ii. 9r, item #21(1).

²⁰⁰ Baxter to My Much Honoured and Highly Esteemed Friend, 12/13 September 1650: DWL MS BC i. 264v (CCRB #48); Baxter, *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, p. 13.

²⁰¹ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, pp. 26-27.

²⁰² Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, p. 400, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 27, *Reduction of a Digressor*, p. 13.

²⁰³ Baxter, *Confession of his Faith*, p. 303.

wicked in ungodliness, by taking away those Motives, without which, no men are converted, or saved, and kept from sin".²⁰⁴

Not only was Antinomianism one giant sin of omission - it failed to result in either obedience or salvation - it was also a gross sin of commission. The end result of the Antinomians' doctrine was a wicked life. In his *Confession* Baxter posed this rhetorical question, "Is such preaching like to make Saints or Libertines?"²⁰⁵ Earlier in the book he had answered it. "The evident tendency also of these licentious Doctrines to a licentious Life, and to the destruction of Godliness, I confess doth increase my detestation of them".²⁰⁶

The problem lay in the essential passivity of Antinomian doctrine. "That 'without faith, [a person] can no more do ought towards the receiving of Christ, then a dead man can walk or speak' is a dead doctrine, like the rest of Antinomianism, tending to licentiousness".²⁰⁷ It encouraged a person to believe not just that duty could do him no good, but that sin could do him no harm. Indeed, to diminish the importance of duty was "to open a Gap to Licentiousness".²⁰⁸ Their denial of obedience as a condition of salvation could only "bring men to wicked lives".²⁰⁹ "Did I not tell you", he warned his reader, "that an Antinomian Faith will cause Antinomian Piety and practice?"²¹⁰ Indeed it would. "I see still whither Antinomianism tends", he remarked, and its principles were "destructive of Fundamentals, and would not stand with salvation, if they were fully reduced to practice".²¹¹ Licentiousness was the "natural tendency" of their

²⁰⁴ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 14.

²⁰⁵ Baxter, *Confession of his Faith*, p. 280.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3. See also p. 282.

²⁰⁷ Baxter, *Reduction of a Digressor*, pp. 131-132.

²⁰⁸ Baxter, *Confutation*, epistle dedicatory.

²⁰⁹ Baxter, *Substance of Mr. Cartwright's Exceptions Considered*, p. 296.

²¹⁰ Baxter, *Confutation*, p. 248.

²¹¹ Baxter, *Reduction of a Digressor*, p. 90, *Admonition to William Eyre*, p. 2.

opinions.²¹² Thus Baxter used “Antinomian” interchangeably with “Libertine” - “because it is the old and fit name” - which suggested practical immorality.²¹³ The one seemed to lead inevitably to the other.

Therefore, Antinomianism was simply ungodliness dressed up in more respectable garb.

I seriously profess, to my best observation it appears to me, that the Antinomian Doctrine is the very same in almost every point, which I finde naturally fastened in the hearts of the common prophane multitudes, and that in all my discourses with them I find, that though the ignorant cannot mouth it so plausibly, nor talk not so much of free Grace, yet they have the same tenets, and all men are naturally of the Antinomian Religion.²¹⁴

To allow people their Antinomianism was simply to leave them in their natural state; conversion and sanctification were stalled. Thus the ungodly and the Antinomians were partners in the same crime. The latter thought that Christ believed and repented for them; “This is just the common faith of the ungodly”. They believed they should not be discouraged by sin; “This the ungodly hold and practise”. They were against repentance and grieving for sin; “I am sure the ungodly are practically against it”.²¹⁵

Baxter’s conviction brought with it two implications. The first was how disastrous it would be if Antinomian doctrine fell into the wrong hands. It would simply confirm the ungodly and unsaved in their presumptuous opinions.²¹⁶ It would utterly destroy the efforts of England’s many godly pastors and evangelists. So often Baxter had in mind the drunkards in Kidderminster’s taverns and the young men in its brothels. These were real people, and their danger was all too apparent. Allowing them the luxury of Antinomian doctrine would only reinforce their licentiousness, and give

²¹² Baxter, *Admonition to William Eyre*, p. 2.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²¹⁴ Baxter, *Confutation*, p. 288. See a similar passage in Baxter, *Admonition to William Eyre*, preface.

²¹⁵ *Catholic Unity: Works*, IV. 658.

²¹⁶ Baxter, *Confession of his Faith*, p. 280.

them apparently religious justification for their persistent refusals to follow their dismayed pastor's way of grace.²¹⁷ This was pastoral work at its most practical, but "when they are reprov'd for wickedness, or perswaded to duty, they say, '*What can the creature do?*' To go out of the Alehouse or Whorehouse, and to go hear the Gospel preacher, is somewhat *towards* receiving Christ".²¹⁸ Antinomianism was the death of evangelism.

The second implication was, as William Lamont has discerned, that there was a causal relationship between Antinomianism and ungodliness.²¹⁹ This meant that, as Baxter explained to John Warren, a "learned man and good headpiece may possibly hold the errors of [the] Arminians, but hardly the Antinomians".²²⁰ If any doctrine was to be preferred - and Baxter disliked both - it was Arminianism, because it strengthened rather than destroyed the foundations of Christian practice.

This is also the main reason why Baxter, perhaps surprisingly, did not see Antinomianism as a visor for Roman Catholicism; at least Rome promoted Christian duty.²²¹ Baxter believed that Antinomianism was the result of "unskilful contending with the Papists" by forcing men into the opposite extreme.²²² That was the point, Antinomianism and Roman Catholicism were opposite extremes.²²³ In his *Confession* truth stood between the two poles of Antinomianism on one side and "Papists and others in the other extream".²²⁴ And Baxter knew which of the two was worst. "[I]t is not to be denied, that the said *Libertine* Doctrines do more contradict the Doctrine of the Gospel,

²¹⁷ *Call to the Unconverted: Works*, II. 506-507.

²¹⁸ Baxter, *Reduction of a Digressor*, p. 132.

²¹⁹ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 128.

²²⁰ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BC vi. 97v (CCRB #22).

²²¹ Baxter, *Confession of his Faith*, preface.

²²² Baxter, *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, p. 115. Baxter drew the same conclusion in *Confession of his Faith*, preface, and *Catholick Theologie*, I. iii. 288, II. 289.

²²³ Baxter, *Confutation*, p. 311.

²²⁴ Baxter, *Confession of his Faith*, p. 151.

even Christianity it self, than the Doctrine of the papists about the same subjects do. I know this to be true, who ever is offended at it".²²⁵ This was heavy condemnation indeed, and demonstrates just how deeply Baxter resented Antinomian doctrine.

Yet once again Baxter was mistaken about the true nature and intentions of Antinomianism. It is staggering just how wilfully he ignored the protestations of Tobias Crisp and John Saltmarsh, who claimed that their doctrine cultivated a holy life. Time and again they denied that their convictions would lead to ungodliness, yet Baxter chose to see - and quote - only the worst. It is also astonishing that Baxter could overlook the affirmation of good works in the Antinomians' central assertion that duties were performed from life and not for it. He ignored the ends, and quibbled over the means. By 1690 he was forced petulantly to concede the "laudable Conversations" of the Antinomians, "But it's no thanks to your irreligious Doctrine".²²⁶ Their bad doctrine had not, in fact, led to bad living. This called into question Baxter's entrenched assumptions about Antinomianism, but he was not about to offer any generous reappraisal. He remained firmly convinced that their doctrine would end in practical licentiousness. And he was drawn so vehemently to denounce Antinomianism, because (again, for reasons of personality) this was a prospect he could never endure.

Pastoral Concerns

Richard Baxter was a pastor at heart. He did everything with practical Christianity in mind. N. H. Keeble sees this the most keenly.

Baxter's multifarious activities...and the composition of so many books, were but a means to a pastoral end. His engagement with any issue or cause was never that merely of a writer, scholar

²²⁵ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, II. 289.

²²⁶ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, "To the Teachers of Dr. Crispe's Doctrine".

or politician. He took up nothing save in terms of its bearing on Christian practice and devotion, and it was with practical consequences that he was always, finally, concerned.²²⁷

Isabel Rivers agrees. "Baxter was certain", she concludes, "that the fundamental end of knowledge was practice... . Baxter's emphasis is always ultimately practical".²²⁸ Karl Joachim Weintraub contemplates the origins of this emphasis, finding them in Puritan-style "purpose-rationality": a concern with discipline, method and results that flowed out of "firm religious convictions".²²⁹ Weintraub is correct to point to Baxter's religious convictions, but his analysis tends to make results an end in themselves, disconnecting them from Baxter's higher goals and heavenly-mindedness. Keeble comes much closer to the truth in his illuminating comparison of Baxter and C. S. Lewis. There Baxter's emphasis on practice flows from the heart of "mere Christianity" with its "insistence that practice alone is the Christian's real business".²³⁰

Baxter offered his own explanation for its origins in a very interesting letter to his learned friend Robert Boyle, author, chemist and leading founder of the Royal Society. Baxter's main purpose in writing was to commend Boyle's thoughtful books. Adopting a deeply philosophical, scholarly and allusive style worthy of his correspondent, Baxter went on to trace the flow of his own intellectual development. The key to this was his work as a pastor. He explained that

when god removed my dwelling into a church yard and sett me to study bones and dust, and by a prospect into another world, awakend my soul from the learning of a child, and shewed mee that my studys must not be a *play*, but *affective, practicall serious worke*, I then began to be conducted by *Necessity*, and to search after Truth but as a meanes to *goodnes[s]*, and to perceive the difference betwixt a pleasant easie dreame, and a waking working knowledge.²³¹

²²⁷ Keeble, "Richard Baxter's Preaching Ministry", p. 540.

²²⁸ Rivers, *Reason Grace and Sentiment*, pp. 110, 117.

²²⁹ Karl Joachim Weintraub, "Bunyan, Baxter, and Franklin: The Puritan Unification of the Personality", in *The Value of the Individual. Self and Circumstance in Autobiography*, Chicago, 1978, p. 250.

²³⁰ Keeble, "Mere Christianity", p. 36.

²³¹ Baxter to Ro[bert] Boyle, [late June-July 1665]: DWL MS BC i. 269r (CCRB #721).

Baxter had become convinced that all knowledge was useless unless it stirred the affections and worked itself out in practice; it must be “waking” and “working”. Thus all people, Baxter concluded with a rather more everyday illustration, should be “as those that knowe not only the materials of an Apothecaries shop, but also the medicinall use of the simples and compositions”.²³² Practice, therefore, was the end of all knowledge.

Baxter laboured this lesson repeatedly. All “right knowledge”, he explained to one of his critics, Thomas Tully, “tend[s] to Practice”.²³³ “I abhorre almost nothing more in Divines”, he affirmed, “then...contradicting one of their first Maxims, that ‘Theology is a Practical Science’”.²³⁴ Thus he could commend his friend, Henry Ashhurst, after his death, who studied this science. “[H]is constant talk was of practical matter, of God, of Christ, of heaven, of the heart and life, of grace and duty, or of the sense of some practical text of Scripture”.²³⁵ Baxter’s commendation, though, raises a paradox. Ashhurst had “neither much studied books of controversy, nor delighted in discourse of any of our late differences”.²³⁶ Controversy, it seems, could never be consonant with a life of practical Christianity. In other words, it is difficult to reconcile Baxter’s emphasis on practice with his constant forays into controversy.

Baxter easily resolved the dilemma. “Errors and Disagreements in Affection and Practice do usually begin in Error and Disagreement in Judgment, so at the Judgment must the Methodicall Cure begin”.²³⁷ In Baxter’s scheme of things knowledge flowed through the faculties of the soul in order: judgement (intellect), will, affections, and

²³² *Ibid.*, i. 270r.

²³³ Richard Baxter, *An Answer to Dr. Tullies Angry Letter*, 1676, p. 49. In *Treatise of Justifying Righteousness*.

²³⁴ Baxter, *Rich. Baxters Account*, preface.

²³⁵ *Faithful Souls shall be with Christ: Works*, IV. 998.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 136r (CCRB #74).

practice. There was a very real connection between the intellect and practice; error usually, if not always, resulted in wrong practice. This meant that it was “the most Practical Teachers and people in England that [were] the most Orthodox”.²³⁸ Correct thinking and right practice went hand in hand. Thus, if “ever you would preserve your graces and conservations, preserve your Judgements”.²³⁹ This is another reason why Baxter embarked on controversy. His was a fight against error not in itself, but as a hindrance to right Christian practice. The problem was in the judgement, and “at the Judgment must the Methodicall Cure begin”.

Baxter’s emphasis on Christian practice was governed by the law of necessity. “I live only for *Work*”, he explained to his highly placed friend, the Earl of Lauderdale, “and should remove only for *Work*”.²⁴⁰ His sprawling literary contributions bear testimony to the truth of his admission. “I have these Forty years”, he proclaimed in 1681, “been sensible of the sin of losing time: I could not spare an hour”.²⁴¹ Driven by such urgency Baxter had no time for superfluous endeavours. As Baxter admitted to his fellow ministers in 1656, “I confess necessity hath been the conductor of my studies and life”.²⁴² His mind rarely strayed from the task at hand, and his attention was fixed on what was present and what was necessary. Baxter said as much to John Eliot, his missionary friend in New England. “As to my writings”, he explained, “indeed my worke is all cutt out to my hands by Providence and necessity: the neerest objects work most strongly, and the neerest work is so strictly mine, that I cannot so oft look further

²³⁸ Richard Baxter, *Rich. Baxters Apology Against the Modest Exceptions of Mr T. Blake...G. Kendall...Ludovicus Molinaeus...W. Eyre...Mr Crandon*, 1654, epistle dedicatory.

²³⁹ Baxter, *Reduction of a Digressor*, p. 13.

²⁴⁰ *Rel. Bax.*, III. 75. Lauderdale had offered Baxter a Scottish bishopric, which he declined. The Scottish climate, he explained, would ruin his health and hinder his work.

²⁴¹ Richard Baxter, *A Breviate of the Life of Margaret...Wife of Richard Baxter*, 1681, p. 78.

²⁴² *Reformed Pastor: Works*, IV. 392.

as I desire”.²⁴³ N. H. Keeble isolates this emphasis on necessity to explain why it was that Baxter burdened the world with so many books. They were “unpremeditated reactions to an immediate situation... . . .written in answer to immediate necessity”. And Baxter’s writing was so invested with vigour precisely by “addressing us in the heat of the moment, exhorting and persuading apparently from immediate concern and without premeditation”.²⁴⁴ Inevitably, controversy was also governed by this principle. “I unfeignedly abhorre contending”, he explained in his contentious *Apology*, “and never write any thing that way, but when I was unavoidably necessitated”.²⁴⁵

There are numerous examples of this necessity at work in Baxter’s career. In 1658 John Warner, Vicar of Christchurch, wrote to Baxter apologetically explaining some harsh words against him in Warner’s recent book.²⁴⁶ He was far too late. In the space of one or two weeks Baxter had written his substantial reply, and had sent it off to the publishers “many weeks” earlier.²⁴⁷ It formed the third part of his *Of Justification*. In 1681 Baxter published his *Breviate of the Life of Margaret...Baxter*. This was written very soon after her death, while Baxter was “still under the power of melting grief”.²⁴⁸ And ten years later, to offer one final example, Baxter made another apology for his badly-timed *Holy Commonwealth* in an unfinished and unpublished treatise against John Humfrey. “I wish I had bin more swift to heare and slow to speake, and slow to wrath. But yet I must say that To reprove publike sin...is but to do Gods necessary worke”.²⁴⁹ William Lamont has demonstrated superbly that such apologies

²⁴³ Baxter to John Eliot, 20 January 1656/7: DWL MS BC iii. 9r (CCRB #351).

²⁴⁴ Keeble, *Puritan Man of Letters*, pp. 3, 10, 67.

²⁴⁵ Baxter, *Rich Baxters Account*, preface.

²⁴⁶ The book was John Warner, *Diatriba fidei justificantis, qua justificantis*, Oxford, 1657. His apology is found in Warner to Baxter, 18 January 1657/8: DWL MS BC iv: 159r (CCRB #424).

²⁴⁷ Baxter to John Warner, 9 February 1657/8: DWL MS BC iv. 163r (CCRB #427).

²⁴⁸ Baxter, *Life of Margaret*, epistle to the reader.

²⁴⁹ Baxter to John Humfrey, [c.summer 1691]: DWL MS BT vi. 296v, item #206 (CCRB #1241).

for *A Holy Commonwealth* are not entirely to be trusted.²⁵⁰ But it is only too plausible that Baxter did react too quickly (to the overthrow of Richard Cromwell in 1659) and only out of immediate necessity.

As a consequence Baxter's books passed in and out of relevance; what was needed one year might not be needed the next. Baxter acknowledged this in his 1675 epistle to the reader of Richard Garbut's book, *One Come from the Dead*. Baxter wrote about "some Books which I have written against some false Opinions, which are up this Year and down the next, and then the Books are like Almanacks out of Date". He commended Garbut's work because it was "like Physick Books...[which] never grow out of Usefulness".²⁵¹ Thus whenever he wrote it was only because "*Present Usefulness* or *Necessity* prevailed over all other Motives".²⁵² He would later ponder why he had written some of his books, but only when he had forgotten their context and that they were "Works which *then* seemed necessary".²⁵³ Baxter was a slave to the moment.

This compulsion of necessity was welded to his concern for Christian practice; the combination gave focus to necessity, and lent urgency to practice. And both were intensified by one of the most marked features of his life and career: constant ill health.²⁵⁴ Throughout his life Baxter was a man, to borrow N. H. Keeble's words, "subject to a bewildering variety of physical ailments".²⁵⁵ He had to cope with abnormal growths on his tonsils and in his eyes; he suffered regularly from a bleeding nose, vertigo and excoriation of his finger tips; in addition he endured pain in almost every

²⁵⁰ Lamont (ed.), *A Holy Commonwealth*, pp. xix-xx.

²⁵¹ Richard Garbut, *One come from the Dead, to Awaken Drunkards and Whoremongers*, [1675?], [Baxter's] epistle to the reader.

²⁵² *Rel. Bax.*, I. 124.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ John R. Knott also recognises this, "Richard Baxter and the Saints' Rest", in *The Sword of the Spirit. Puritan Responses to the Bible*, Chicago, 1971, p. 74.

²⁵⁵ Keeble, *Puritan Man of Letters*, p. 11.

possible part of his body which prevented adequate sleep and sapped his energy; and added to it all were “incredible inflammations of Stomach Bowels, Back, Sides, Head, Thighs, as if I had daily been fill’d with Wind”.²⁵⁶ “I never knew, heard, or read of any man that had near so much”, he concluded miserably.²⁵⁷

Paradoxically, sickness both helped and hindered Baxter’s literary career. While it drastically limited the amount of time he could dedicate to his study,²⁵⁸ his afflictions invested these efforts with particular intensity. In his *Dying Thoughts* he disclosed the early results of his ill condition.

Great mercy hath trained me up all my days since I was nineteen years of age, in the school of affliction, to keep my sluggish soul awake in the constant expectations of my change... . The face of death, and nearness of eternity did much convince me what books to read, what studies to prosecute, what company and conversation to choose. It drove me early into the vineyard of the Lord, and taught me to preach as a dying man to dying men.²⁵⁹

Baxter’s sickness was the most profound and consistent influence on his life. It is this which, above all else, shaped Baxter’s miserly stewardship of his time, his single-minded focus on his work and his emphasis on practical Christianity. “I unfeignedly thank God”, he declared, “that, by sickness and his grace, he called me early to learn how to die, and therefore to learn what I must be and how to live”.²⁶⁰ And it was this experience that lay behind his steadfast commitment to pastoral care. “O brethren”, he beseeched his ministerial colleagues in 1656, “if you had all conversed with neighbour death, as oft as I have done, and as often received the sentence in yourselves, you would have an unquiet conscience, if not a reformed life in your ministerial diligence and fidelity”.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 10, 11, 58, 81, 82; III. 60, 173.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 173.

²⁵⁸ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BC vi. 96r (CCRB #22).

²⁵⁹ *Dying Thoughts: Works*, III. 1030.

²⁶⁰ *Compassionate Counsel to all Young Men: Works*, IV. 27.

²⁶¹ *Reformed Pastor: Works*, IV. 446.

Compelled by necessity and driven by “neighbour death”, Baxter was a man dedicated to the conscientious practice of Christianity. Woe betide the Antinomians, then, who “destroy the principles of practice”.²⁶² For this reason, Baxter reserved for them his greatest dislike. He was, Keeble observes, “led into controversial areas only when they impinge[d] upon practice”, and this was especially true of the “dire practical consequences of antinomianism which led Baxter to exempt this from his general embargo on partisan controversy and to combat it throughout his life”.²⁶³ J. I. Packer also recognises that

Baxter conducted the controversy with [the Antinomians] as we should expect a Puritan pastor to do. For him, the crux was not the theoretical issues concerning justification, but the practical question of the nature of faith, the grounds of assurance and the necessity of good works.²⁶⁴

Baxter’s fight against Antinomianism was not just one for the truth, it was also one for that practical application of godly living.

Therefore, as a theory Antinomianism was illogical and untenable; in practice it was utterly abhorrent. As a doctrine it engaged a mind already prone to complex theological controversy; as a way of life it raised the temper of a man who valued practical Christianity above all. He could not tolerate it, in any form. He never launched a more sustained and heated attack on any other doctrine. Time and time again Baxter pronounced Antinomianism - as he described it - to be the opposite of all that was Christian. It was “a perverse corrupting of Christianity, and not to be heard without detestation”.²⁶⁵ Antinomianism was a false gospel that could bring only “utter ruine”.²⁶⁶ He questioned “whether Antinomians may not much fitter be called Anti-

²⁶² *The Poor Man’s Family Book: Works*, IV. 240.

²⁶³ Keeble, “Mere Christianity”, p. 37.

²⁶⁴ Packer, “Redemption and Restoration”, p. 408.

²⁶⁵ Baxter, *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, p. 40.

²⁶⁶ Richard Baxter, *An Appeal to the Light, Or, Richard Baxter’s Account of Four accused Passages in a sermon on Eph. 1.3*, 1674, p. 4.

Christians, or Anti-Gospellers” or “*Anti-Christ*s”.²⁶⁷ They were the “enemies of the Gospel”, and to entertain their doctrine was “to betray the Gospel, and mens souls”.²⁶⁸ To preach against the Antinomians was to preach against immorality itself.²⁶⁹

Ultimately, then, Antinomianism - as Baxter defined it - was a heresy. It “overthrows the very Christian Religion, and is of more pernicious consequence, than most ever were introduced by any Hereticks into the Church”.²⁷⁰ This was a very serious charge indeed. “I take a full Antinomian to be one that is unfit for Christian communion, As subverting the very substance of Christian Religion”.²⁷¹ For Baxter, the supposed champion of catholicity, the Antinomians belonged outside the church - essentially for suggesting that works were performed from life, not for it.

Why did Baxter construct such a hostile, polemical representation of the Antinomian system? This complex and multi-faceted question has been partially answered. His many writings against the Antinomians were the outflow of his “naturall temper”. Provoked by a mixture of controversial inclinations and pastoral concerns, he reacted to their perceived errors and practice. But this is by no means the whole answer. It is essential now to move beyond Baxter’s static, systematic analysis of Antinomian doctrine, and to see it in its historical context. Only in this way can the complexity of the subject and its importance to Baxter be fully understood, and the shifting intensity of his opposition be discerned. Baxter always responded to the need of the moment; it is time now to consider the nature of that late-1640s necessity.

²⁶⁷ Baxter, *Defence of Christ And Free Grace*, p. 39, *Confutation*, p. 250.

²⁶⁸ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BC vi. 97v (CCRB #22); Baxter, *Admonition to William Eyre*, preface.

²⁶⁹ Baxter, *Admonition to William Eyre*, preface.

²⁷⁰ Baxter, *Confutation*, p. 224.

²⁷¹ Baxter, *Admonition to William Eyre*, p. 6.

~ PART TWO ~

Chapter Four

ARMIES, ANTINOMIANS AND APHORISMS

~ The 1640s ~

*The groanes, teares and blood of the Godly; the Scornes of the ungodly;
the sorrow of our friendes; the Derision of our enemies;
the stumbling of the weake, the hardening of the wicked;
the backsliding of some; the desperate Blasphemyes and profanenes[s] of others;
the sad desolations of Christs Churches,
and woefull scandall that is fallen on the Christian profession,
are all the fruites of this Antinomian plant.¹*

Of all the decades that comprised Richard Baxter's long and colourful life, the 1640s must surely rate as the most turbulent and the most formative. This is certainly true of his soteriological development. He was thrust from the familiar routine of church ministry into the uncomfortable, disputatious life of army chaplain, and he was struck by severe ill health, almost to the point of death. These crises may seem unrelated to his theology, but, in fact, Baxter's malleable soteriological understanding was profoundly shaped by this 1640s experience. During the decade he underwent a dramatic, if drawn out, conversion. His eyes were opened to the full horror of Antinomian doctrine, his mind was exposed to the clear light of truth, and as he emerged from these eventful years he did so burdened with a mission to rescue England from the disturbing prevalence of Antinomianism. His motives, though,

¹ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 199v, item #199 (CCRB #74).

were misunderstood, his message was unwelcome, and, in the end, his mission was a failure. By then, however, even he had finally realised that it was never necessary in the first place. Be that as it may, the effects of these eventful years on Baxter would last a lifetime. And any historian who seeks to understand him must come to grips with his decisive experience during this turbulent time of England's troubles.

Conversion

Richard Baxter entered the 1640s as a serious-minded young man of twenty-four, and only then was his direction in life becoming clear. He had been sidetracked from a university education, he had rejected the way of preferment at Court, and he had served briefly as a schoolmaster.² Finally, in 1640, he had received his first posting as assistant pastor at Bridgnorth, in Shropshire. As it happens he had been quickly disappointed by that promising position, finding the flock there to be "a very ignorant, dead-hearted People".³ Already, then, he was a man of serious intentions for the ministry, but his doctrinal convictions had not yet been tested by adequate learning and experience.

When I was first called forth to the sacred Ministerial work, though my zeal was strong, and I can truly say, that a fervent desire of winning souls was my motive: yet being young and of small experience, and no great reading...I was a Novice in knowledge, and my conceptions were uncertain, shallow and crude: In some mistakes I was confident, and of some truths I was very doubtful and suspicious.⁴

During the 1640s all of that changed. In particular, the soteriology of Baxter was overturned completely.

² *Rel. Bax.*, I. 4, 11, 13.

³ *Ibid.*, I. 15.

⁴ Richard Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof Of Infant Church-membership And Baptism Being The Arguments prepared for (and partly managed in) the publike Dispute with Mr. Tombes*, 1651, "The true History...". For specific issues over which he was uncertain - assurance and nonconformity, for example - see *Rel. Bax.*, I. 14, 22-23; Baxter, *Confession*, preface.

Initially, Baxter was devoted to those doctrines upon which his later interpretation of Antinomianism would rest. For “ten years”, for example, he believed in “passive Righteousness”.⁵ He was also “once half ensnared my self in the opinions of *Justification before faith, and that Justification by Faith, was but in foro Conscientia, &c.*”.⁶ For a long time he readily believed that Christ died for sins against the new covenant as well as the old.⁷ And he was, finally, a vociferous opponent of universal redemption.⁸ Clearly, Baxter was well down the road to fully-fledged Antinomianism. He “remained long in the borders of *Antinomianisme*, which I very narrowly escaped”.⁹

During the 1640s Baxter reversed his position on these key soteriological issues, and by the end of the decade he had settled on a soteriological system that shut out every vestige of Antinomian belief. It was a dramatic change, but not a sudden one. He had to be “cudgelled to [the truth] before I would admit it to my selfe”, he confessed in 1649, and even then “in many of the smaller [truths] I am not fully satisfyed my selfe”.¹⁰ So his position took some considerable battering first, a thought confirmed by his admission in the *Aphorismes* that “I resisted the light...as long as I was able”.¹¹ It is not all that easy to discover what those forces were that “cudgelled” his convictions. Few of Baxter’s records from before 1649 are extant, so little evidence exists in which this transformation might be traced. And reconciling his later recollections - inevitably coloured by hindsight - is not always straightforward.¹² Still, it is possible to deduce the

⁵ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 55.

⁶ Baxter, *Confession*, p. 3.

⁷ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp. 155-156.

⁸ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, preface; Baxter to T[homas] D[oelittle], 6 March 1656/7: DWL MS BC i. 121v (CCRB #363).

⁹ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, p. 163.

¹⁰ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BC vi. 96r (CCRB #22).

¹¹ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 291.

¹² Handling the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* is especially difficult. See below, pp. 307-308.

main causes of this about-face and to suggest several important hypotheses, even if much of the detail remains forever shrouded in mystery.

To begin with, Baxter's original doctrinal position was vulnerable to change in any case, since he had not adequately thought it through. He had been blinded by his own dislike for Arminianism, which lay at the opposite end of the soteriological spectrum from Antinomianism. Most of his acquaintances were also vehement opposers of Arminianism, so as Baxter began to study soteriology his "mind was settled in prejudice against Arminianism, without a clear understanding of the case".¹³ Moreover, the books he was reading and trusting only confirmed his opposition to Arminianism. His "mind was so prepossessed with their notions, that I could not possibly see the truth...[and] my mind was so forestalled with borrowed notions, that I chiefly studied how to make good those opinions which I had received".¹⁴ And the more Baxter wrangled against Arminianism, the more he was blinded to what he later embraced as the truth.¹⁵

Thus in 1640 Baxter's doctrinal position was set, but potentially fragile. The faultlines were there, but they required an earthquake to collapse his soteriological structure. His experience of England's civil war proved the ideal catalyst for such a change. Verbally abused and physically threatened, Baxter was forced from his beloved parish of Kidderminster in 1642 to the relative safety of Gloucester, and then, after a brief return to Kidderminster, he moved on to Coventry.¹⁶ Like many others he "fled there for Safety from Soldiers and Popular Fury",¹⁷ driven "by the insurrection of a

¹³ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, preface.

¹⁴ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, p. 110.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 40-41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 44.

rabble that with clubs sought to kill me".¹⁸ In his *Reliquiae* he recalled the sense of dislocation.

To live at home I was uneasie; but especially now, when Soldiers on one side or other would be frequently among us, and we must be still at the Mercy of every furious Beast that would make a prey of us: I had neither Money nor Friends: I knew not who would receive me in any place of Safety; nor had I anything to satisfie them for my Diet and Entertainment. Hereupon I was perswaded by one that was with me to go to *Coventry*, where one of my old Acquaintance was Minister.¹⁹

Coventry was a good choice, and Baxter enjoyed a safe haven there for two years, from 1643 to 1645. During his stay he preached once or twice a week to the army garrison, which proved to be "a very Judicious Auditory; among others many very godly and judicious Gentlemen".²⁰ This isolation provided a welcome calm amidst the surrounding storm.

This was Baxter's first extended contact with the army, which he thought was "filled...with sober, pious Men".²¹ He must have gained that impression from the garrison stationed at Coventry, in which "many of the Foot Soldiers were able to baffle both Separatists, Anabaptists and Antinomians, and so kept all the Garrison sound".²² Elsewhere, especially in Oliver Cromwell's regiment - so he heard - these sects were enjoying much greater success.²³ In fact, Baxter began to believe that Cromwell and Henry Vane - the man who had supported Anne Hutchinson in England and who was now a highly placed parliamentarian - had banded together to hijack the New Model army for the sectarian cause.²⁴

¹⁸ Baxter to [Stephen?] L[obb?] 9 and 16 June 1684: DWL MS BC ii. 93r (CCRB #1139).

¹⁹ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, I. 45

²² *Ibid.*, I. 46. Baxter described the manoeuvres of the Anabaptists at Coventry in more detail in Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, "The true History...".

²³ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 47.

In 1645 Baxter ventured out of his isolation at Coventry to test the waters and to visit some friends in the army nearby at Naseby. “When I found them”, he explained,

I stayed with them a Night, and I understood the state of the Army much better than ever I had done before... I found a new face of things which I never dreamt of... Independency and Anabaptistry were most prevalent: Antinomianism and Arminianism were equally distributed.²⁵

There are problems with this account; something certainly worried him, but it is not all that clear what it was. Why should Antinomianism concern him, if he was already a supporter of its key doctrines? And it is unlikely that he discovered in just one night that the Antinomians were so numerous and so powerful, as he later claimed.²⁶ No, his discovery was probably much more personal and immediate than that. Baxter had visited the army to check on some of his “intimate Friends”.²⁷ Just over ten years later he justified his hostility to Antinomianism, and he may well have had the same companions in mind. “Antinomianisme”, he explained, “came neerer me infecting my neere friends and spread among those who were like to spread it through the land”.²⁸ On several other occasions he made mention of his “dearest, best esteemed friends”, “dearest and most intimate friends”, “dearest bosom friends”, companions of “long acquaintance” and “dear friends” who had been seduced.²⁹ The repetition suggests significance: his own friends had become corrupted, and this is what he found out at Naseby. He later recalled these friends who had fallen in with the Antinomians “in the late wars”. “No sooner was this doctrine received”, he lamented, but it produced a “sudden looseness of their lives, answering their loose, ungospel-like doctrine”.³⁰

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 50.

²⁶ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, preface, *Penitent Confession*, p. 22; Richard Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to Believers: In what sence sound Protestants hold it; And, of the false devised sence, by which Libertines subvert the Gospel*, 1675, p. 22. In *Treatise of Justifying Righteousness*.

²⁷ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 50.

²⁸ Baxter to Francis Tallents, 7 January 1655[/6]: DWL MS BC ii. 172v (CCRB #286).

²⁹ *Saints' Everlasting Rest: Works*, III. 4, 57, 343, *Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience: Works*, II. 912; Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, “To the Church at Bewdley”.

³⁰ *Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience: Works*, II. 912.

Rather than discerning the state of the entire army, then, Baxter saw for the first time how Antinomian doctrine - the basic tenets of which he had, until that point, accepted - could be openly abused. This may well have aroused concern for the state of the army, through which the doctrine could so easily spread, but his friends were the focus.

Baxter was never the same again. Largely as a result of that one night's observation he was provoked to enter the army as a chaplain in Colonel Whalley's regiment. Baxter was convinced that the army had been badly neglected by England's ministers. They were guilty of "forsaking the Army, and betaking themselves to an easier and quieter way of life".³¹ He was sure that their "Worth and Labour in a patient self-denying way, had been like to have preserved most of the Army, and to have defeated the Contrivances of the Sectaries", but the task had been left undone.³² He blamed himself most of all. He had haughtily turned down an invitation from Cromwell's regiment to be their pastor, and he berated himself for the consequences.

These very men that then invited me to be their Pastor, were the men that afterwards headed much of the Army, and some of them were forwardest in all our Changes; which made me wish that I had gone among them, however it had been interpreted, for then all the Fire was in one Spark.³³

Baxter was determined not to make the same mistake twice, and it was with no small measure of penitence that he enlisted as an army chaplain.

The effect of his two years as chaplain was substantial. Two inter-weaving strands are important here. First, Baxter was increasingly beset by a number of fears. These fears were unrealistic - even he came to see that in time - but they were powerful in their effect. They propelled him into action, mainly to combat Antinomianism, which he isolated as the root cause of present problems. Second, in the face of this

³¹ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 50. See also, Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, p. 22.

³² *Rel. Bax.*, I. 50.

³³ *Ibid.*

Antinomianism, Baxter began to reconsider his soteriology, and the effects of this reappraisal endured long after the fears which provoked it had subsided. What ties these two strands together is the context in which they appeared: the context of civil war.

When Baxter later looked back on the war it was not with any degree of sentimental nostalgia; it had brought nothing but disaster. These were the

days of common sufferings, when nothing appears to our sight but ruin; families ruined, congregations ruined; sumptuous structures ruined; cities ruined; country ruined; court ruined; kingdoms ruined... . Oh the sad and heart piercing spectacles that our eyes have seen in four years' space! In this fight a dear friend is slain; scarce a month, scarce a week, without the sight or noise of blood.³⁴

He went on to mourn at length the effect of this distress. "It is natural for both wars and private contentions to produce errors, schisms, contempt of magistracy, and ordinances, as it is for a dead carrion to breed worms and vermin: believe it from one that hath too many years' experience of both in armies and garrisons".³⁵ His keen sense of loss and disappointment was palpable.

Oh, what abundance of excellent, hopeful fruits of godliness, have I seen blown down before they were ripe, by the impetuous winds of wars, and other contentions, and so have lain trodden underfoot by libertinism... . I never yet saw the work of the gospel go on well in wars.³⁶

The link with "libertinism" is significant, because Antinomianism became a major factor in this disaster. He recalled with distaste the time when

sin set fire to the land, and warres drove me from my former home, which bred abundance of sins and errours, as vermine breed in exposed carcases: Among the rest, hearing and reading, the abusers of God's Grace, tell troubled soules that '*Christ had repented and believed for us, and that we ought no more to question our faith and repentance, than to question Christ*'.³⁷

The Antinomians were "the abusers of God's Grace"; more importantly, they seemed to be growing ever more powerful and prevalent in the army, and in the nation as a whole.

As an army chaplain, Baxter felt he had so much to overcome, not just from the soldiers, but from other army preachers. He complained about William Dell and the

³⁴ *Saints' Everlasting Rest: Works*, III. 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, III. 235. See also Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, "The true History...".

³⁶ *Saints' Everlasting Rest: Works*, III. 238.

³⁷ DWL MS BT v. 19v, item #143.

arch-Antinomian John Saltmarsh, “the two great Preachers at Head Quarters”, and he longed for more assistance from other ministers.³⁸ He was unable to hinder Cromwell in his design to head “the greatest part of the Army with *Anabaptists, Antinomians, Seekers, or Separatists*, at best.”³⁹ By now he did not doubt that a vast, malicious plot was under way - orchestrated by Oliver Cromwell and carried out by his sectarian subordinates who “infected” the counties - to subvert the nation with error and division.⁴⁰ Baxter was not exactly sure of Cromwell’s own position, but “the most that he said for any was for *Anabaptism* and *Antinomianism*”,⁴¹ and that was more than enough to satisfy Baxter. His Antinomian opponents in the army, then, seemed to occupy a very powerful position indeed, and this aggravated his fears.

This was not the only cause for concern, however; the disease was spreading! London was apparently being overrun by Antinomians.⁴² This influential city was “the heart of the whole nation; [it] cannot be sick but we all feel it. If [it] be infected with false doctrines, the countries [counties] will, ere long, receive the contagion”.⁴³ And the works of Tobias Crisp, the Antinomians’ “most eminent Ring-Leader”, were enthusiastically received by “ignorant Professors” everywhere. The nation was under siege. Antinomian doctrine “seemed to be likely to have carried most of the professors in the Army, and abundance in the City and Country that way”.⁴⁴ The prospect horrified him, “[e]specially when I saw how greedy multitudes of poor souls did take the bait, and how exceedingly the Writings and Preachings of *Saltmarsh* and many of his fellows did

³⁸ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 56.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I. 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 56, 57.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I. 57.

⁴² Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness to Believers*, p. 21.

⁴³ *Sermon of Judgment: Works*, IV. 851.

⁴⁴ Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness to Believers*, p. 21.

take with them".⁴⁵ The disease seemed to be breaking out everywhere, with no sign at all of slowing down.

But these fears were exaggerated. First, the army was not the threat Baxter had supposed. Recent historiography casts some doubt on the accuracy of Baxter's assessment of the New Model army. The problem with his analysis is that it was written after the event. Hindsight is a mixed blessing; it provides clarity but invites distortion. For example, a letter of June 1646 gave no hint of a sectarian scheme; instead it expressed hopes that the Independent influence could be balanced by the Presbyterians.⁴⁶ And while it is true that the political radicalism of the army was a major factor leading up to the regicide, this was only a step-by-step process born of expediency and circumstance. To say, as Baxter did, that the army followed a long-established insurrectionist plot was simply to read the end into the beginning. And his claim that he attempted to hinder the army's march towards rebellion was a useful way, after the Restoration, of distancing himself from those disturbing developments.

Still, some historians agree with Baxter's perceptions, but only when they rely on Baxter's own testimony and when it serves their purposes. Christopher Hill, for example, paints the picture of a radical New Model army.⁴⁷ He accentuates the political radicalism that the army fostered, which extended to religious radicalism, heresy and irreligion.⁴⁸ Likewise, William Haller (though for different purposes) accepts the radical

⁴⁵ Baxter, *Confession*, preface.

⁴⁶ [Baxter?] to ?, June 3 [1646]: Edwards, *Gangraena*, III. 46. Admittedly, this letter is anonymous. Leo Solt (*Saints in Arms*, p. 8) accepts its anonymity, but William Haller (*Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution*, New York, 1955, p. 194) claims - unfortunately with no supporting evidence - that it was written by Baxter. It bears classic Baxter touches (such as the numbered list of points, the concern at Dell and Saltmarsh and support for the magistrate) and there is nothing in it to suggest that he was not its author.

⁴⁷ Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, ch. 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-31.

agenda of the army and its preachers.⁴⁹ And Gertrude Huehns believes “the army was saturated with antinomian tendencies”.⁵⁰

However, other historians - those not so willing to take Baxter at his word⁵¹ - offer a more subtle analysis. Leo Solt, for example, accepts that “it is quite doubtful that the rank and file of the New Model Army were as deeply imbued with religious ideas as [its] chaplains contended”.⁵² He is also cautious about the army’s radicalism on specific issues: religious toleration, political liberty and democracy.⁵³ Ian Gentles sensibly points out that the army was made up of both religious and irreligious soldiers.⁵⁴ He admits that the role of the chaplains has been overstated,⁵⁵ and he points out a prevalence of piety that helped to unify the army into a confident and ruthless force.⁵⁶ And Anne Laurence concludes that the New Model army was an important “home for religious radicalism”, but the “most obvious aspect of religion in [it]...is that it was neither predominantly radical nor predominantly sectarian, but was pluralist. Radical mechanic soldier-preachers co-existed with less radical chaplains”.⁵⁷

Mark Kishlansky also modifies Baxter’s troubled perceptions of the army. The significance of such chaplains as Dell and Saltmarsh, for example, has “certainly been over-played”.⁵⁸

How effective so few men were or could be in trumpeting radical religion to the truncated brigades of the New Model is impossible to estimate, but their roles have certainly been overplayed... Radical chaplains and mechanic preachers did exist within the New Model. They were supported by groups within the Army that held to independent and sectarian doctrines. Their existence, however, should not imply that the Army as a whole espoused or

⁴⁹ Haller, *Liberty and Reformation*, pp. 198, 200.

⁵⁰ Huehns, *Antinomianism*, p. 88.

⁵¹ For instance, see Anne Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains 1642-1651*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1990, pp. 76, 78.

⁵² Solt, *Saints in Arms*, p. 14. See also, p. 16.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 60-61, 101, 103.

⁵⁴ Gentles, *New Model Army*, pp. 88, 91, 94.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108, 115.

⁵⁷ Laurence, *Army Chaplains*, pp. 86, 85.

⁵⁸ Kishlansky, *Rise of the New Model Army*, p. 71.

supported such viewpoints. Both existed in far greater profusion in London and had little success in spreading radical theology... . If religious radicals looked to the Army for support it was because they could find it nowhere else.⁵⁹

In the end, though, radicalism did flourish in the army, and the spread of heresy was “undeniable in the face of four years of religious confusion [and] lack of trained ministers”.⁶⁰ All of this recent research suggests that Baxter’s fears for the army were plausible, but overstated.

His fears for the nation were also exaggerated. England was not about to be overrun by Antinomians, and later evidence bears this out. To begin with, numerous correspondents painted a more positive picture. Baxter’s neighbouring minister, John Tombes, for example, thought the Antinomian invasion was Baxter’s delusion. He questioned whether Baxter really had met that many licentious Antinomians.⁶¹ Likewise, where Baxter saw “most”, his friend John Warren saw “very few” who were Antinomians.⁶² Baxter was also accused of being “too much contrary” to the Antinomians.⁶³ Francis Tallents - who highly valued Baxter, even if he disagreed with some of his doctrines - commented on the intensity of Baxter’s overreaction. In his apprehension over Antinomianism Baxter had recoiled too far in the opposite direction, “which I conceive, your holy zeale against loosenes[s] stirred up by Saltmarsh etc has occasioned. Antinomianisme yet seems to me a company of bad conclusions drawn from good principles”.⁶⁴ Tallents was not alone in his convictions.⁶⁵

More importantly, though, Baxter’s own testimony confirms that the Antinomian threat was negligible. In 1654 his concern had declined and he was finally

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-73.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶¹ Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, p. 202.

⁶² See below, pp. 170-171, 172.

⁶³ Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, “The true History...”.

⁶⁴ Fra[ncis] Tallents to Baxter, 24 April 1655: DWL MS BC ii. 161r (CCRB #243).

⁶⁵ Baxter to Abraham Pinchbecke, 12 October 16[5]8: DWL MS BC iv. 56r (CCRB #508).

able to view the Antinomianism of the late 1640s with some objectivity. He then offered this remarkable admission:

The opinions of these Libertines were so carnall and grosse, and their lives ordinarily so scandalous, and the ends of many of them so fearful, that through Gods mercy, it was but very few that were seduced by them; and both they and their reasonings did seem so contemptible; that learned men thought it needlesse to trouble themselves with them.⁶⁶

Finally, Baxter could concede that “very few” had been tempted to Antinomianism. Baxter had done more than “trouble” himself with them, but here he conceded that such wasted energies were “needlesse”. He had once viewed their “scandalous” lives as a disturbing threat, now they seemed a preventative. And a year later he rejoiced that

I hear none of this [Antinomian] preaching in our Country [county]. I never heard one of them in the Pulpit tell all the prophane; *For ought I know, you may all be absolved from the guilt of death, and obligation to punishment long ago, though not as Terminated in your Consciences.*⁶⁷

Even Baxter could admit, after his fears had diminished, that he had never heard any Antinomian preaching in his own locality. He had undeniably overreacted to the threat of Antinomianism to England’s religion. But this was in the 1650s, when Baxter could afford to be generous; a decade earlier, when he was convinced that England was about to be captured by Antinomianism, he enjoyed no such luxury.

It is clear, then, that Baxter was grappling with a number of fears during his time in the New Model army. They may have loomed too large in his imagination, but they had a decisive effect on his life. His campaign as chaplain was one effect, and the steady change in his own soteriology was another. As Baxter explained long after, it “was the Army and Sectarian Antinomians (more fitly called Libertines) who first called me in the year 1645. and 1646. to study better than I had done the Doctrine of the Covenants, of Redemption and Justification”.⁶⁸ More specifically,

⁶⁶ Hotchkis, *Exercitation*, [Baxter’s] preface. Baxter was clearly referring to the English Antinomians; in the next sentence he attached the names of Eaton, Saltmarsh and Crisp to their group.

⁶⁷ Baxter, *Confession*, p. 280.

⁶⁸ Baxter, *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, preface. Baxter first wrote the preface around 1678, but it was not published until 1690.

I went (after *Naseby* Fight) into that Army as the profest Antagonist of the Sectaries and Innovators... . I there met with some *Arminians*, and more *Antinomians*: These printed and preached as the Doctrine of Free Grace, that all men must presently believe that they are Elect and Justified, and that Christ Repented and Believed for them... . These new notions called me to new thoughts.⁶⁹

It is intriguing to consider what was “new” about these “notions”. Baxter was certainly already aware of justification *in foro conscientia*, passive faith, and limited atonement - he confessed to accepting them. But these ideas (such as Christ obeying and repenting for the elect) may indeed have been new to him, or at least new developments upon an older foundation that he had already embraced, and they “brought more clearly to my mind the differences between Christs worke and ours”.⁷⁰ Moreover, Baxter actually met people who used these doctrines to justify their sinful practices. So these new, practical applications opened Baxter’s eyes to the direction in which his own soteriological position would inevitably lead him. This awakening prompted him to reconsider his theology, and it contributed to the vehemency with which he later repudiated Antinomianism.

Army debates were the catalyst for this change. During his time as chaplain Baxter did what he could to stem the tide of doctrinal deviancy through “many a painfull night and day, and tiresome wrangling”.⁷¹ In his *Reliquiae* he recalled how he spent his time.

I set my self from day to day to find out the Corruptions of the Soldiers: and to discourse and dispute them out of their mistakes, both Religious and Political: My Life among them was a daily contending against Seducers, and gently arguing with the more Tractable, and another kind of Militia I had than theirs.⁷²

Among several others, the issues of debate were “Free-grace and Free-will, and all the Points of Antinomianism and Arminianism. So that I was almost always, when I had

⁶⁹ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, preface.

⁷⁰ DWL MS BT v. 19v, item #143.

⁷¹ Baxter to [Stephen?] L[obb?] 9 and 16 June 1684: DWL MS BC ii. 93r (CCRB #1139).

⁷² *Rel. Bax.*, I. 53.

opportunity, disputing with one or the other of them...oft against Antinomianism and the contrary Extream".⁷³ He was clearly a determined debater. In 1650 he reminded his former comrades in parliament's army (then in Scotland) that he "was allwayes free in dispute, and never refused a Congresse with any". He bested all those "feeble Disputants" that stood against him, and "never in all my abode in the Army mett with one man that would stand it".⁷⁴ These were, therefore, years of intense debate in which soteriological doctrines were dissected and discussed repeatedly.

And in the course of this army experience Baxter's own soteriological convictions were beginning to melt. He was especially helped by

reading *Saltmarsh's* Flowings of Grace: which I saw so exceedingly taking both in the Country and the Army (where I then was) that I fell on the serious perusal and consideration of it: and its palpable errors were a most usefull discovery to me of some contrary Truths, while I was endeavoring to confute him.⁷⁵

Saltmarsh was a tremendously important influence on Baxter during this time. Significantly, it was he who "lead me to the discerning of that necessity of a twofold Righteousness".⁷⁶ This was an essential component of Baxter's later soteriology, and it is ironic indeed that Saltmarsh was the one to provoke its discovery. More generally, the soldiers "were just falling in with *Saltmarsh*, that *Christ hath repented and believed for us, and that we must no more question our Faith and Repentance, than Christ*. This awakened me to study these points".⁷⁷ Baxter's disputes, then, were helping his own thoughts to coalesce into a more settled and integrated form.

Meanwhile, his campaign in the army continued. It was not going well. Even though he claimed that he had "prevailed with most" and that no man had ever beaten

⁷³

Ibid.

⁷⁴

Baxter to Friends in the Army, [c.June 1650]: DWL MS BC ii. 269v (CCRB #41).

⁷⁵

Baxter, *Confession*, preface.

⁷⁶

Ibid.

⁷⁷

Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to Believers*, p. 22.

him in a dispute,⁷⁸ he was forced to admit to Richard Vines in 1650 that he could “prevaile with none to purpose”.⁷⁹ He anxiously fretted over his lack of influence on this aggressive infection. Worse still, on “that very day” in February 1647 when Cromwell and his colleagues “began their conspiracy against the Parliament...God separated me from them” by the collapse of his health.⁸⁰ This disaster may have ended his limited effect on them, but their influence on him was about to bear fruit. What really made the difference to his soteriological development occurred not inside the army, but outside, during “a long vacancy in deep weakness of body”.⁸¹

Life in the army had inevitably aggravated Baxter’s sickly condition.⁸² There he “endured so many cold stormes, and unseasonable marches, and lain out of doores so many raining nights together” that he “contracted so many sicknesses to my body, and at last even death it selfe”; well, almost.⁸³ During the cold and snowy winter of 1647 Baxter’s nose started bleeding. After some considerable loss of blood he opened four veins, following the logic of humoral theory that his body contained too much blood. It ended his army career and very nearly killed him.⁸⁴

The period of recuperation that followed was by far the most intense phase in Baxter’s soteriological transformation. The army atmosphere had done its work by prompting him to reconsider his position, but this brush with death, “succeeding the beginning of these thoughts, did much more enforce them then before”.⁸⁵ As he slowly

⁷⁸ Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, p. 22; Baxter to Friends in the Army, [c.June 1650]: DWL MS BC ii. 269v (CCRB #41).

⁷⁹ Baxter to Richard Vines, 24 July 1650: DWL MS BC ii. 24r (CCRB #46).

⁸⁰ Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, p. 23.

⁸¹ Baxter, *Confession*, preface.

⁸² Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, p. 22.

⁸³ Baxter to Friends in the Army, [c.June 1650]: DWL MS BC ii. 269v (CCRB #41). See also *Saints’ Everlasting Rest: Works*, III. 2.

⁸⁴ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 58.

⁸⁵ Baxter, *Confession*, preface.

recovered, Baxter began to write the *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, his most famous devotional work, which focused on the Christian's future rest in heaven. When he reached page sixty-eight of his manuscript he was faced with the problem of Matthew 25, a chapter in which Christ judged the "sheep" and the "goats" on the basis of their works. "I seriously set my self to understand", he later recalled. "I found so great difficulties as drove me to God again and again". And then the moment of insight:

thereupon [came] great light that I could not resist; so that I solemnly professe that it was partly on my knees, and partly in diligent consideration of the naked Text (when I had not so much as Authors or the thought of them with me) that I received the substance of the fore-mentioned particulars.⁸⁶

Only when Baxter was removed from his books and friends was he finally able to see clearly. Like some hermit, his isolation brought with it divine communication. All that he had struggled to hold on to was swept away in one traumatic and decisive religious experience. He was entrenched in his "borrowed notions" right up until this blinding revelation; he had continued in his prejudice

till at last, being in my sicknesse cast far from home, where I had no booke but my Bible, I set to study the truth from thence, and from the nature of the things, and naked evidence; and so, by the blessing of God, discovered more in one weeke, then I had done before in seventeen yeares reading, hearing and wrangling.⁸⁷

This was the defining moment of Baxter's theological development. "This was his watershed", William Lamont exclaims, when Baxter "reaches out for the language of religious conversion (for the only time in his life) to describe his excitement".⁸⁸ Baxter's language really was vivid. "An over-powering Light", he enthused, "did suddenly give me a clear apprehension of those things, which I had often searched after before in vain. Whereupon I suddenly wrote down the bare propositions".⁸⁹ In a flash of insight, then, pounced upon by divine revelation, everything finally fell into place.

⁸⁶ Baxter, *Unsavoury Volume*, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, pp. 110-111.

⁸⁸ Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, p. 47.

⁸⁹ Baxter, *Unsavoury Volume*, p. 5.

So significant was the occasion that Baxter compared his experience to the Apostle Paul's. "I want you to know", Paul had written,

that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I...was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ...I did not consult any man...I went immediately into Arabia, and later returned to Damascus... [The churches] heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy'.⁹⁰

Baxter said much the same thing:

I fetched not this doctrine from man... I did not to my utmost remembrance, receive from any Book or Person in the world; but only upon former study of the Scriptures, some undigested conceptions stuck in my minde, and at the time of my conceiving and entertaining those Notions (about the nature and necessity of a twofold Righteousnesse, and many the like) I was in a strange place, where I had no book but my Bible.⁹¹

There were certainly similarities between the two men's experience, but Baxter's assessment is unlikely. It demands careful qualification in two ways.

First, Baxter was indeed isolated, but he could not so easily disconnect himself from his previous reading, even if the books themselves were not with him. In particular, as he set aside his prejudice and went to the Bible he "remembered two or three things in Dr. Twisse".⁹² Even in his *Aphorismes*, immediately after describing his revelation and before disavowing the influence of other authors, Baxter was quick to recognise the foundation that had been laid. "Not that I therefore repent of reading those other mens writings: for without that I had not been capable of those latter studies".⁹³ So Baxter's previous reading bore fruit, along with his recent experience; "I was prepared with much disputing against Antinomianism in the Army".⁹⁴ The ideas suddenly crystallised, his soteriological scheme finally came together with significant

⁹⁰ Galatians 1:11-24.

⁹¹ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, p. 110, *Unsavoury Volume*, p. 5. See also Baxter to John Warren, 7 November 1649: DWL MS BT xiv. 88r, item #324 (CCRB #25).

⁹² Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, preface.

⁹³ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, p. 111.

⁹⁴ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 107.

clarity, the period of flux and development was important but over, and Baxter's rescue from Antinomianism was complete.

The second qualification is that this transformation was not as thorough as the Apostle Paul's. Paul ended up "preaching the faith he once tried to destroy", but Baxter never preached Arminianism. Not many have fully appreciated the true intentions of Baxter's position. It was designed to demolish Antinomianism, not to defend Arminianism. There is a very great difference between his own soteriology and Arminianism, despite some surface similarities. In fact, the truth of this is so subtle that even William Lamont is deceived.

Lamont argues repeatedly that in the late 1640s and early 1650s Baxter attempted to correct the association of Arminianism with William Laud, and so to rehabilitate Arminianism as a viable Protestant doctrine and reopen the debate in its favour.⁹⁵ In other words, Lamont argues that in the years following the civil war Baxter became an Arminian. This view is hard to sustain. It is true that Baxter repeatedly offered apologies for having earlier misjudged Arminianism, but these apologies should not be taken as a positive endorsement of the doctrine, the purpose for which Lamont employs them.⁹⁶ They simply underscored Baxter's antipathy to Antinomianism. Likewise, Baxter's assertion that Arminianism and impiety were not causally related was only ever a condemnation of Antinomianism, not a vindication of Arminianism.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, p. 47; "The Religion Of Andrew Marvell", in Conal Condren and A. D. Cousins (eds), *The Political Identity Of Andrew Marvell*, Aldershot, 1990, pp. 145, 147; "Rise of Arminianism Reconsidered", p. 229; "The Puritan Revolution: A Historiographical Essay", in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 125-127; *Millennium*, pp. 135-136; and "Arminianism: the controversy that never was", p. 45.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Lamont, "Arminianism: the controversy that never was", p. 59.

⁹⁷ Lamont, "Puritan Revolution", p. 126.

Moreover, Baxter's own words contradict Lamont. "I believe that Arminianisme is a doctrine of error", he wrote in 1649.⁹⁸ "I feele not myself tempted much to Arminianisme", he protested in November 1653, "so that I am strongly confident (though not certaine) that no man need to suspect me... . I cannot pray well with the Arminian doctrine".⁹⁹ Hardly resolute, perhaps, but he was much more decisive in 1691. "I am no Arminian", he asserted,¹⁰⁰ and he never had been. In his *Reliquiae* he contrasted himself with George Lawson, who "was himself near the *Arminians*...and so went further than I did from the *Antinomians*".¹⁰¹ Baxter continually warned anyone who would listen not to fall from one extreme into the other. Indeed, Antinomianism itself was the product of such careless thinking. Baxter was prepared to concede that truth "borders close to error, and therefore close to Arminianism"¹⁰² - the impression of Lamont and many others, then, is understandable - but Baxter never went so far. "And consider", Baxter explained to some fellow ministers in 1654,

that through Satans Policye, few errors were ever reformed in the Church, but men were carryed into the Contrary extreames...multitudes have bin drawne to the Pelagian, Lutheran and Arminian way, even Learned Godly men, to avoid the hard consequences on the other side.¹⁰³

Therefore, if Baxter ever sounded like an Arminian it was only by accident; it was just that his anti-Antinomianism looked suspiciously like it.

Yet even though Baxter did not lapse into Arminianism, his transformation was dramatic.¹⁰⁴ The process had been neither immediate nor straightforward, but by the end of the 1640s Baxter was a changed man. His encounter with the Antinomians in the

⁹⁸ DWL MS BT xiv. 1v, item #325. Admittedly this unfinished treatise is undated, but see below, Appendix B, "Undated Treatise", pp. 309-312.

⁹⁹ Baxter to Peter Ince, 21 November 1653: DWL MS BC i. 11v (CCRB #148).

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 107.

¹⁰² Baxter, *Confutation of a Dissertation*, p. 201.

¹⁰³ DWL MS BT v. 262v.

¹⁰⁴ See John Spurr's discussion of the Arminian flavour of Baxter's new soteriological position, John Spurr, "From Puritanism to Dissent, 1600-1700", in Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (eds), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, 1996, p. 261.

army had helped to open his eyes to a new soteriological truth totally at odds with theirs, and vastly different from that with which he began. It should be very clear, however, that in the process he had overreacted to the Antinomian threat. His fears were not implausible, but they were unrealistic. The Antinomians were not attempting to subvert the nation through the New Model army and its radical contacts in London. Yet in one sense the fact of this overreaction is incidental; what matters is its effect on Baxter's life and writings. Baxter had seen the light, now he saw a need, and he was determined to meet it. Immediate necessity set him to work, he pursued a pastoral end through controversial means, and once again the *Aphorismes of Justification* is of central significance.

Mission

Richard Baxter emerged from the 1640s as a man with a mission, determined to cure England of its Antinomian disease, and to destroy this "late elevated Sect among us".¹⁰⁵ He thought it only his "duty to do as men that have scaped a quicksand to set up a marke and leave behind me, that others might beware".¹⁰⁶ He later described himself as one that attempted "the subversion of Antinomianism".¹⁰⁷ Of course, others had been doing that for several years, and Baxter's contributions first appeared just as theirs began to dry up, yet Baxter - a fresh convert to a new vision - was determined to have his say. He used every opportunity to discredit and denounce Antinomianism, both in public - through the *Aphorismes of Justification* - and in private - through personal

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 211.

¹⁰⁶ DWL MS BT xiv. 1v, item #325.

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, *An Answer to Dr. Tullies Angry Letter*, p. 74.

correspondence. In each case, Baxter's agenda was clear: to expose Antinomianism wherever he found it, and to apply his new-found soteriological remedy to this dreadful disease.

To begin with, Baxter's *Aphorismes of Justification* did more than just demonstrate his soteriological transition from the "borders" of Antinomianism to a point far removed from its vitiating taint.¹⁰⁸ It was also his practical response to the Antinomian threat. If Saltmarsh had spread his leaven through the dough by way of the printed word, so too would Baxter. Thus the *Aphorismes* was just as much an attempt to defeat bad doctrine as his earlier decision to enter the army as a chaplain. Now, however, his own conversion experience had bequeathed to him added intensity and vigour; his task was no longer just theological and pastoral, it was also personal.¹⁰⁹ The *Aphorismes* vented these compulsions. It was Baxter's prescription for England's cure to this virulent disease. It remained to be seen, though, just how willingly his patient would swallow the medicine.

This, Baxter's first book, was the immediate product of his 1647 revelation. He had already begun his *Saints' Everlasting Rest* - the result of his death-bed contemplations - so the *Aphorismes*, originally intended as a brief appendix to the *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, was most intimately connected with his 1647 experience. It was closely linked both in the timing of its construction ("I suddenly wrote down the bare Propositions") and in its subject matter ("so many of them as concerns Righteousness and Justification").¹¹⁰ And so the book was born.

¹⁰⁸ It has already been shown how the *Aphorismes* was the opposite of Antinomianism at every point. See above, pp. 116, 118-127.

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, *Confutation of a Dissertation*, p. 179, *Confession*, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Baxter, *Unsavoury Volume*, p. 5.

Nothing is clearer than that it was written solely against the Antinomians. At least, it should have been abundantly clear. As it happens many misunderstood the book's purpose, together with Baxter's own newly-established soteriological position. Failing to appreciate its true target, a great many chose to see it as an expression of Arminianism, if not Socinianism,¹¹¹ and the same misunderstanding persists today. In order to make his case that Baxter had turned Arminian, William Lamont is forced to argue that the *Aphorismes of Justification* was an Arminian document. Lamont is partly correct to see the *Aphorismes* as "a brave challenge to the Calvinist doctrines of the men who were creating a new Commonwealth".¹¹² It was indeed a brave challenge, but Lamont's emphasis on merely Calvinist doctrines, rather than extreme Calvinist doctrines (which is essentially how Baxter described Antinomianism), distorts Baxter's real concerns and lays undue emphasis on Arminianism. Thus Lamont concludes that the *Aphorismes* was "one of the greatest anti-Calvinist polemics of the seventeenth century".¹¹³ While in his latest work he views it as an "assault on Antinomianism", he persists in interpreting the book as possibly "the most telling and most decisive...puritan defence of Arminianism".¹¹⁴

Other writers, however, disagree. N. H. Keeble recognises that in his *Aphorismes* Baxter was simply "challenging...what he took to be antinomian tendencies in Calvinism".¹¹⁵ "Having escaped himself", from Antinomianism, "his anxiety to prevent others from being ensnared was the cause of his first book."¹¹⁶ Alan C. Clifford

¹¹¹ See, for example, Ri[chard] Vines to Baxter, 1 July 1650: DWL MS BC ii. 15r (CCRB #44).

¹¹² Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 134.

¹¹³ William Lamont, "The Left and Its Past: Revisiting the 1650s", *History Workshop*, 23 (1987), p. 145.

¹¹⁴ Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, pp. 167, 188, 47. The emphasis is Lamont's.

¹¹⁵ N. H. Keeble, "The Autobiographer as Apologist: *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696)", *Prose Studies*, 9 (1986), p. 105.

¹¹⁶ Keeble, *Puritan Man of Letters*, p. 70.

also sees the *Aphorismes* as “the first of [Baxter’s] many forays against antinomianism”.¹¹⁷

The work itself is not exactly explicit about its purpose, but there is ample evidence of its Antinomian target throughout. Its system of doctrine was pointedly anti-Antinomian. Moreover, the Antinomians were mentioned regularly. Baxter was forced to explicate his views on evangelical righteousness, for example, “because some Antinomians doe down-right oppose them, and some that are no Antinomians have startled at the expressions, as if they had conteined some self-exalting horrid doctrine”.¹¹⁸ The touchstone of that expected opposition was Antinomianism. Indeed, the “ignorant wretches” that “startle at such doctrine” on another point were “the Antinomians, and some other simple ones whom they have misled”.¹¹⁹ These were the people Baxter was trying to rescue. And more specifically, John Saltmarsh, the effect of whose Antinomian influence Baxter really feared, regularly came in for specific rebuke.¹²⁰

The subject matter of the book also betrays its true focus. Hans Boersma is wrong to assert that “Baxter never devoted a single treatise to the doctrine of the covenant”,¹²¹ because that is exactly what the *Aphorismes* was. Baxter described it to John Warren as “a Treatise of the Covenants and Justification”, and twice at the end of his life he remembered it as the “*Aphorismes of Covenants and Justification*”.¹²² It was an apt title. In the book he argued that the covenant was a law, and admitted to Warren

¹¹⁷ Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, p. 21. See also p. 25.

¹¹⁸ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 109.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹²⁰ For example, see Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp. 90, 112, 276, 316 and appendix, p. 35.

¹²¹ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 265.

¹²² Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 136v, item #199 (CCRB #74); DWL MS BT v. 20r, item #143; Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, p. 25.

that to deny him on this point was to unravel “the whole fabricke of my discourse”.¹²³ Baxter’s central assertion in the *Aphorismes*, that the new covenant was indeed a law, was the opposite of all that Antinomianism by definition stood for.

Even so, Baxter could have been much clearer about the book’s purpose, and was forced to be so only when it was too late. In 1651 he clarified his purpose for John Tombes, “I wrote that book especially against the Antinomians”.¹²⁴ Four years later, in his *Confession*, he admitted that “mine eye was upon the Libertines, commonly called Antinomians, through the whole, being wakened to a compassion of many ignorant well meaning Christians, who were then following their delusions in a full career”.¹²⁵ He made even more revealing admissions in private letters. “I remain confident”, he asserted, “that I can maintain most of the *Antinomian* Dotages against any man that denyeth the principles of my Book”.¹²⁶ In other words, to deny the theology in his *Aphorismes* was necessarily to maintain Antinomian doctrines. He was a little gentler in public, explaining much the same thing to John Tombes. “I...do here solemnly professe”, he asserted, “that I am confident no adversary to the main doctrines of that book...is able to confute the Antinomian dotages; but he will build them up with one hand as he pul[l]s them down with the other”.¹²⁷ However Baxter put it, it is obvious he felt this tract was the last word against Antinomianism. He explained to Robert Abbott that “I am not able to confute an Antinomian if I desert the maine pointes in my theses”.¹²⁸ The *Aphorismes* was, then, the indispensable weapon with which to attack Antinomianism.

¹²³ Baxter to John Warren, 7 November 1649: DWL MS BT xiv. 68v, item #324 (CCRB #25).

¹²⁴ Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, p. 191.

¹²⁵ Baxter, *Confession*, p. 2.

¹²⁶ Baxter to [Anthony Burgess], 5 April 1650: Baxter, *Of Justification*, p. 176 (CCRB #39).

¹²⁷ Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, p. 191.

¹²⁸ Baxter to Richard Vines, 24 July 1650: DWL MS BC ii. 24r (CCRB #46).

And it was a timely weapon. The *Aphorismes* was a dam constructed to stem the flood of Antinomian opinion and success. With it Baxter intended to correct the erring doctrine of his fellow divines, to rescue those whom the Antinomians had so deviously misled, and to restore English religion to its proper course. But while it was certainly the most important, it was not his only avenue of action. The *Aphorismes* was his public attempt to banish Antinomianism wherever it lurked, but he carried on the same mission in private correspondence. These letters and papers provide a detailed insight into the pattern of his anti-Antinomian agenda. Invariably Baxter was defending the *Aphorismes* in these letters, but his goal was also to further the purposes for which he had originally conceived it. Beginning in 1649, then, Baxter carried on his assault on Antinomianism in private. To see it fully, the historian must go behind the scenes.

The pattern was simple enough. If Baxter suspected that his correspondent was possessed with Antinomian leanings he was careful first to outline the foolishness of that position, and then to rebuke him directly for holding such dangerous doctrines. If, however, his correspondent was immune from Antinomian influence, he was almost entirely spared these fervent denunciations. For example, Baxter carried on extended correspondence with Anthony Burgess, to whom he had (without Burgess' knowledge) addressed his *Aphorismes*. Even though Burgess himself had written against the Antinomians,¹²⁹ Baxter lectured him on the finer points of Antinomian doctrine. Thus his campaign spared no one, and without hesitation he condemned Burgess' doctrine - parts of which were "grossest Antinomianism" - as dangerous.¹³⁰ Baxter's August 1651

¹²⁹ Baxter to [Anthony Burgess], 28 June 1650: Baxter, *Of Justification*, p. 246 (CCRB #43). Burgess' first book, *Vindiciae Legis: Or, A Vindication of the Morall Law And The Covenants, From the Errours of...Antinomians*, 2nd ed., 1647, dealt (as its title suggests) with the continuance of the moral law. His second book, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated, From The Errours of...Antinomians*, 2nd ed., 1651 (1st ed, 1648) focused on the doctrine of sin.

¹³⁰ For Antinomian elements see, for instance, Baxter to [Anthony Burgess], 28 June 1650: Baxter, *Of Justification*, pp. 191, 218 (CCRB #43) and Baxter to My Much Honoured and Highly Esteemed

reply to George Lawson, however, was a lengthy discussion of soteriological issues which made little reference to Antinomianism. Such allusions were not entirely absent¹³¹ - they never could be - but Baxter was much more muted against them, simply because Lawson was an Arminian.¹³² Lawson was safe from Antinomian persuasion, so it was unnecessary for Baxter to expose their doctrines, hence their absence from his reply.

The very best example of Baxter's strategy (to recover those infected by Antinomian opinions) is his extended correspondence with John Warren - then the vicar of Hatfield Broad, but who had lived with Baxter as a schoolboy at Bridgnorth - between August 1649 and October 1651. It is well worth considering in detail, because it spans the period of greatest intensity in Baxter's apprehension. It also demonstrates the complex inter-weaving of Baxter's context, his doctrinal understanding, and his response to the needs of a particular audience; the strands that determined the depth, shape and colour of his concerns. Finally, it reveals the deeper cause of his great anxiety.

Warren began the dialogue by offering his response to the *Aphorismes*.

After serious perusal being as much unsatisfied with many things therein contained, as delighted in the rest, which smell not onely of mature study, but divine inspirings, I thought my well deserved Thanks for those might not unfitly be conjoynd with some Observations on the other.¹³³

In his brief letter Warren objected to Baxter's "bitter, and sarcasticke language against them that dissent from you in judgment, Particularly *Mr [George] Walker*". Moreover,

Friend, 12/13 September 1650: DWL MS BC i. 264v (CCRB #48). Baxter called Burgess' doctrine unsafe, for its Antinomianism, in Baxter to [Anthony Burgess], 28 June 1650: Baxter, *Of Justification*, pp. 224-225.

¹³¹ See, for instance, Baxter to [George Lawson], 5 August 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 65r, 70v, 88v-90r, item #197 (CCRB #72).

¹³² *Rel. Bax.*, I. 107.

¹³³ Jo[hn] Warren to Baxter, 27 August 1649: DWL MS BT xiv (ii). 3r, item #322 (CCRB #16).

how “unworthy a kind of language is it to call the greater part by far of all the Godly ministers in England besides some few, (And very few) The vulgar sort of unstudied Divines?”¹³⁴ Clearly Warren’s impression of the state of religion in England was far different from Baxter’s. And to call

the Antinomyans (whose doctrine I cannot embrace Indeed) Ignorant Wretches, because they understand not the distinction of Legall, and Evangelicall Righteousness, with which as you lay it downe, I am confident you cannot shew three Orthodox Divines...to receive it. So that together with the Antinomians you move that Opprobrious brand of Ignorant wretches generally on the soundest, and most worthy preachers of the Gospell, who neither have received, nor can embrace, your Doctrine in this point.¹³⁵

Baxter had been far too demanding for Warren, who stood up in defence of English ministers. He found it intolerable that Baxter’s too-broad definition should lead him harshly to condemn so many able pastors in one go. But more than that, Warren probably took Baxter’s criticisms personally. He was no Antinomian, but he did hold to some of their principles, and may well have felt the charge had been laid on him.

Some of those principles emerged from eighteen pages of animadversions to which this note was attached. In them Warren denied that afflictions were punishments for sin in believers.¹³⁶ He also denied that the gospel was a law; for him it was simply a covenant. Because of this understanding he did not accept that performing its conditions could constitute a believer’s righteousness, since righteousness was only a conformity to a law, not a covenant. In turn this undermined Baxter’s stand on legal and evangelical righteousness, a needless and mysterious distinction in Warren’s eyes. He also argued that imperfect righteousness was a contradiction in terms, and denied the progressive nature of justification.¹³⁷ All of this proved more than enough for Baxter to sniff the stench of Antinomianism.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* See Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 51.

¹³⁵ Jo[hn] Warren to Baxter, 27 August 1649: DWL-MS-BT xiv (ii). 3r, item #322 (CCRB #16). See Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 123.

¹³⁶ DWL MS BT xiv (i) pp. 8-10, item #321.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv (i) pp. 15-17.

Baxter's polite reply a month later, merely an advance party on his full response to Warren's animadversions, was considerable. After lengthy excuses for not replying in full more promptly Baxter quickly leapt onto the offensive, accusing Warren of "pulling downe mine, and setting up nothing of your owne in the place".¹³⁸ "O what peace might we have", he went on to complain, "if men were but conscious of their own defectiveness",¹³⁹ yet Baxter himself showed no such awareness. He defended his language and launched an even heavier attack on George Walker (ironically, in the interests of the church's peace).¹⁴⁰ Baxter defensively repeated his claim that most of the vulgar sort of divines were enamoured with Antinomian error. And that he

soe called the Greatest part of all the Godly Divines, I thinke it is past your power to know whether it be true, or false (which yet you should have knowne before you had spoken it)...[H]ow can you know? perhaps I can give you a larger list of them among my acquaintance, then you are yet aware of. I am sure you have not had the opportunity of soe trying all the Divines in England, as to be able to say that one part are soe very few...And where then is the truth of your accusation?¹⁴¹

Warren would, no doubt, liked to have seen Baxter's evidence for his claim, but none was forthcoming. He was left to ponder how Baxter could be so sure of his own perceptions, and would have been vindicated by Baxter's later admission.¹⁴² At least Baxter picked up on Warren's sense of offence; "it falls out that you are not among the vulgar sort", he reassured him.¹⁴³

Baxter was also quick to defend his abuse of those who were provoking his apprehension.

That I call the Antinomians Ignorant Wretches (a phrase of pittie) I confess: I would recant it if I durst. ffor indeed since I had allmost bin one my selfe ten yeares agoe (which makes me speake more sensibly against them) I have fully discerned their exceeding Ignorance.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BT xiv (ii). 5r, item #323 (CCRB #22).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 5r.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 5r-7r.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 7r.

¹⁴² See above, p. 156.

¹⁴³ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BT xiv (ii). 7r, item #323 (CCRB #22).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Baxter's experience compelled him, and he went on to defend his right, and the great need, "to call them an Ignorant Sort".¹⁴⁵ So there would be no concession on that score either. Baxter ended his letter with evidence from other respected writers of twofold righteousness, and his standard apology for any offensive abruptness in his letter.

Baxter's lengthy response to Warren's animadversions was sent two months later, in November 1649. It is too large to consider in its entirety here, but some of its main points illuminate the extent of his concern about the Antinomians, and his growing fear that John Warren himself had fallen in with them. The phrase "Ignorant Wretches" continued to occupy Baxter as he revealed his view of the world.

I see you are a man hard to be pleased. [Y]ou charge me for my saying the Antinomians are Ignorant Wretches, as if I dealt too roughly with them (And indeed if I had sought the favour of the Great Commanders of the World, I had bin a foole if I would have soe said) And now where I deale more gently you thinke I comply with the Adversary.¹⁴⁶

The Antinomians, then, appeared to be ruling England, and all that sought advancement and applause should speak in their favour. Baxter was hardly one to do so.

Baxter began to take note of Warren's opinions which sounded suspiciously Antinomian. In response he affirmed, for example, that afflictions were punishments for sin.¹⁴⁷ On that opinion "I provoke you to the Judgment of all Interpreters: nay of all Christians except Socinians, and Antinomians, and some of their Spawne".¹⁴⁸ His suspicions increased. He was "sorry that you jumpe with the Antinomians in this... I remember now how much you were offended, that I called the Antinomians Ignorant Wretches".¹⁴⁹ Baxter finally recognised the cause of his offence, but he was unrepentant. "I am sorry to find you in this minde", he continued, "what Antinomian

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 7v.

¹⁴⁶ Baxter to John Warren, 7 November 1649: DWL MS BT xiv (ii). 25v, item #324 (CCRB #25).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 36v.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 49r.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 49v.

living goeth further in this?"¹⁵⁰ Still, Baxter politely expressed his reluctance actually to use the label. "I will not for all this take you either for Pelagian, Socinian or Antinomian (for one errour must not so denominate a man if it be not the great and chiefe one)".¹⁵¹ Such restraint was tested, however, as Baxter questioned Warren on one opinion, "Doe not you know Sir that it is grosse Antinomianism?"¹⁵²

Along the way Baxter unveiled new angles on his opposition.

What shall we thinke of those Antinomians that say the Law is void and bindes them not? It seemes then nothing bindes them! Oathes, and Covenants have not the least ingaging force of themselves: Nor is it any unrighteousnesse to breake them, nor righteousnessse to keepe them. And do you thinke then, that such men are fit for humane society? you were angry with me for calling them Ignorant Wretches: but if this be true they are somewhat worse then Ignorant.¹⁵³

It is revealing that Baxter feared their influence in the everyday transactions of social discourse and interaction, and their weakening of those bonds that held stable society together. It formed an important connection with his world that had itself endured recent social upheaval.

Baxter's deep concern about Antinomianism had shown through in his response. He had made regular mention of Antinomian opinion, he had laid more than enough hints to indicate his fear that Warren had already been ensnared in their way, and he had made a mild attempt to rescue him. He ended with the usual apologies for his "manner of expression", and invited further animadversions.¹⁵⁴ Those animadversions, when they came, would prove that more than just hints were required.

Warren's second round of animadversions was undated, but probably arrived during 1651, in time for Baxter's response in October of that year. In them Warren persisted in his ways. He maintained that the performance of the covenant conditions

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 50v.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 51r.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 61r.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 86v-87r.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv (ii). 109v.

did not constitute righteousness.¹⁵⁵ He objected to Baxter's image of a pepper corn - implying that the conditions of salvation were inconsequential - declaring "we must admit no price in Justification".¹⁵⁶ "I deny utterly", he declared, "that the performance of the Condition of the Covenant is in Scripture or may be in any tollerable sense called merit".¹⁵⁷ He also affirmed that justification procures the sinner's freedom absolutely and in every respect.¹⁵⁸ While Warren's belief in covenant conditions reassured, there was much about his reply that gave Baxter great cause for concern.

At nearly eighty-five folios Baxter's response is massive.¹⁵⁹ It demonstrates again a general rule of his correspondence, that to send him a letter addressing complex issues was to generate a reply at least six times as long. Thus Baxter took Warren's comments very seriously indeed. Once again he began his reply in polite civility, bestowing on Warren "the honour of the sharpest Intellectuall Acumen of most men that hath yett vouchsafed me their Animadversions", but he cast doubt on the depth of Warren's acquaintance with key soteriological truths.¹⁶⁰ This was an important qualification, because in this long letter Baxter developed his conviction that Warren had strayed into Antinomianism. This was Baxter's final rescue effort.

Warren had denied that the gospel was a law; Baxter replied that it was "not tollerable among Christians" to assert that "Christ as Lord-Redeemer have not a particular Law" so that "there is no peculiar kind of Obedience due to him as such".¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ DWL MS BT vi. 95r, item #198.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vi. 97r.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vi. 101r.

¹⁵⁹ There are actually two copies of Baxter's response to Warren, in DWL MS BT vi. 116r-199v, item #199 and BT iii. 25r-98r, item #61 (c). The latter has been mislabeled as a "Treatise by an unknown opponent. Unknown hand" (Roger Thomas, *The Baxter Treatises. A catalogue of the Richard Baxter papers (other than the letters) in Dr Williams's Library*, Dr Williams's Library Occasional Paper No. 8, 1959, p. 5). Parts of item #199 are written by Warren, but the differences between the two items are minimal. References here are to item #199.

¹⁶⁰ Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 116r, item #199 (CCRB #74).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vi. 124v.

This was a difference of great importance. "Will you tell a Minister when he preacheth Repentance, ffaith in Christ, Love to Christ &c. that he preacheth only the Law, as distinct from the Gospell properly taken? The Antinomians say so indeed".¹⁶² Baxter also warned Warren that by denying love and repentance to be conditions of the gospel, he was doing so on those same grounds on which the Antinomians denied faith to be a condition.¹⁶³ Obviously he continued to be concerned by Warren's apparent Antinomian inclinations, but he could offer this relieved concession:

one thing I am glad of: that where I feared you savoured of the opinions of the Antinomians (in making the Covenant equivalent to Absolute; the Covenant and Gospell to be properly no Law; the sins after ffaith not to deserve death explicitly &c) I find you are further from their great opinion of Justification or Remission either from eternity, or uppon Christs death, before our believing, than any man that ever I mett with.¹⁶⁴

Warren did indeed savour of those important opinions, and Baxter's relief to discover limits to Warren's Antinomianism was evident. This did not, however, stop him from pointing out Antinomian error along the way, error in which Warren himself had joined.¹⁶⁵

Indeed, Baxter was becoming increasingly concerned with his friend's Antinomian inclinations. Although he was "loathe openly to owne it", Warren obviously agreed that duties were from life, not for it.¹⁶⁶ Baxter was also disappointed that Warren could not accept his similitude of the pepper corn.¹⁶⁷ His concern was initially disguised in an attack on the Antinomians, but it was quickly laid bare as hints gave way to explication.

I confess, sir, I abhorre the sawcynes and ingratitude of Libertines (commonly called Antinomians) who dare charge God with selling his pardon and salvation, if he do but require them to believe, and Love him, and sincerely obey him for the future, as the Condition of their full enjoying of them!...[T]hese men dare tell him to his face: Thou dost not offer us thy Grace

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, vi. 125r.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, vi. 145r.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vi. 148v.

¹⁶⁵ See, for instance, *ibid.*, vi. 150v, 155v, 176r, 181v, 198r.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, vi. 186r.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, vi. 151r.

freely!...I think the greater half of the doctrine, which in these papers you oppose to mine, is flatt Libertinisme, and Antinomian.¹⁶⁸

Baxter had finally come right out and said what had been on his mind all along. Warren's opinions were already dangerous enough, but given sufficient encouragement they would lead inexorably to full Antinomianism. This was the danger that drew out his concern.

At the end of his treatise Baxter was ready to make his final appeal.

I had thought here in the Conclusion to have drawne together the substance of your doctrine that you might have seen the face of it, and the dangerous consequences: but it may seem only to make it odious; ergo I will adde but these two Arguments besides what is done before, and so conclude.¹⁶⁹

In fact, Baxter's conclusion did expose for Warren the sad face and deplorable consequences of his doctrine. Antinomianism had been swirling in the current all through this substantial response, and in the conclusion it came at last to the surface. Finally, the powerful source of Baxter's anxiety was most clearly and explicitly revealed; at last, Baxter disclosed to Warren where his doctrine must surely lead him; and here, in his conclusion, Baxter brought into play his heaviest weapon against Antinomianism: the civil war. Of all the many statements that Baxter ever uttered against the Antinomians, this was the most revealing.

To Conclude: Other ages have but heard of Antinomian doctrines, but have not seen what practicall birth they travailed with as we have done. It hath brought forth before our eyes those Antinomian practices, that do fully convince us, that the Actors do not take sincere obedience to be any Condition of their Absolution or Salvation; nor the Receiving of Christ as Christ, that is, as their King and Lord, to be Justifying ffaith; nor Christ to be *Novus Legislator*; nor his Gospell or Covenant to be a Law, either to Guide or Judge them. The groanes, teares and blood of the Godly; the Scornes of the ungodly; the sorrow of our friendes; the Derision of our enemies; the stumbling of the weake, the hardening of the wicked; the backsliding of some; the desperate Blasphemyes and profanenes[s] of others; the sad desolations of Christs Churches, and woefull scandall that is fallen on the Christian profession, are all the fruites of this Antinomian plant.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vi. 177v.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vi. 198v.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vi. 199v.

Thus Antinomianism supplied Baxter's explanation for the crisis and tribulation that he and the nation had endured. Outright disrespect for authority and tradition, such contention and disobedience, the rebellion and the regicide could only be the products of a doctrine that denied obedience and respect to Jesus Christ as king and His gospel as law. To see an individual's actions was to discover his doctrine; to witness the course of a distracted nation was to discern the doctrine that caused such upheaval. Baxter was convinced that in the 1640s Antinomianism had given birth to the civil war and all the trauma that ensued. Here was his explanation for a world turned on its head, here was the mother-lode of his intense concern. Put simply, Baxter blamed Antinomianism for the civil war.¹⁷¹

And this was the doctrine that Warren was so blindly embracing! Thus Baxter's October 1651 letter captured the essence of his fundamental objections to the Antinomians, and it offered an analysis that reflected a maturity in his thinking on Antinomianism. The civil war was bad enough; the regicide, though, confirmed his worst suspicions about the Antinomians. It occurred too early to affect his thinking in the *Aphorismes*, but having mulled it over he was determined to remove the mask and reveal to John Warren the danger of the doctrine with which he toyed, so that he might see "the face of it, and [its] dangerous consequences".¹⁷²

Given its importance, Baxter inevitably made this interpretation a feature of his continuing public campaign against Antinomianism. But he did so under important constraints. Of his *Plain Scripture Proof*, published in 1651, he later explained that in it there were

¹⁷¹ Of all Baxter's historians, only William Haller has discussed this connection, *Liberty and Reformation*, p. 198.

¹⁷² Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 198v, item #199 (CCRB #74).

many enigmatical Reflections upon the Anabaptists for their horrid Scandals, which the Reader that lived not in those times will hardly understand; But the cutting off the King, and rebelling against him and the Parliament, and the Invading *Scotland*, and the approving of these, (with the Ranters and other Sects that sprang out of them) were the Crimes there intended; which were not then to be more plainly spoken of, when their Strength and Fury were so high.¹⁷³

True, he referred to the Anabaptists here, not the Antinomians. But his recollection demonstrates very clearly the pattern of his thinking - the war and regicide could be the “horrid Scandals” of religious groups. Moreover, he always believed that Antinomians were a hundred times worse than Anabaptists.¹⁷⁴ He explained as much to the Anabaptist, John Tombes, reassuring him that his deepest dislike was for Antinomians, “against whom I confess my zeal is far greater than against Anabaptists”.¹⁷⁵ So there is every reason to believe that the Antinomians were the dominant figures in Baxter’s mind in the years from 1649 to 1651, and that he saw them as the main players in England’s upheavals. The point is, though, that he had to be very careful about how he said it.

Numerous “enigmatical Reflections” combine to reveal his thinking in the matter. In 1651, for example, Baxter made an intriguing addition to the second edition of the *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*. Once again, employing almost the same language as he used in his warning to Warren, he bitterly, but guardedly, blamed England’s “hideous doctrines, and unheard of wickedness” on the Antinomians.¹⁷⁶ In the same year he recalled how he had seen his

hopes frustrated, and the sparks of error and discord break into flame... . We were bound to lament the danger of our dear friends, and to be somewhat sensible of our own danger, when the flames and infection was broke out so near us; but especially to lay to heart the danger of the whole country, the wrong of Religion, Gospel and Interest of our Lord.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 109.

¹⁷⁴ Baxter, *Admonition to William Eyre*, preface.

¹⁷⁵ Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, p. 258.

¹⁷⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest: Or A Treatise Of the Blessed State of the Saints in their enjoyment of God in Glory*, 2nd ed., 1651, p. 5.

¹⁷⁷ Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, “To the Church at Bewdley”.

Baxter's sense of danger, his imagery of disease and infection, and the feared extent of Antinomianism's influence all bear witness to the troubled depths of his concern. He recalled when "the infection was got nearer the vitals of Christianity, and the pulse of the Nation so evidently showed that it had tainted the Arterial blood and spirits, that a mean Physitian might have prognosticated the critical Issue which we have since seen and felt".¹⁷⁸ That was the point, the effect of bad doctrine was so disastrous that it had been easily "seen and felt". "*England* hath seen within these few last years", he complained in 1654, "the Antinomian Doctrine as effectually brought into practice, and that which seemed as a tollerable speculation, bring forth as real doleful effects, as most ever Nation did on earth".¹⁷⁹ Antinomian doctrine was put into practice not so much individually as nationally; the civil war and regicide, he was sure, were the epitome of practical Antinomianism.

As Lamont explains of the *Aphorismes*, the "point which emerges in that work - and it is confirmed in his private correspondence - is how clearly Baxter related the errors and crimes of his day to false religious doctrine. The antinomian preachers...left an indelible mark on the impressionable Baxter".¹⁸⁰ They certainly did. Even in 1655 Baxter still bewailed the "experience which we have seen of the real Issue, and sad effects of this licentious Doctrine".¹⁸¹ His concern was rampant. Antinomianism "hath this day *troubled England*". The crises of the 1640s were God's judgement on Antinomianism. They were "such as this Land is full of, and now groans under".¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, "The true History...".

¹⁷⁹ Baxter, *Confutation of a Dissertation*, epistle dedicatory.

¹⁸⁰ Lamont, "The Left and Its Past", p. 145.

¹⁸¹ Baxter, *Confession*, p. 3.

¹⁸² Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, p. 189.

Baxter was so open to this interpretation of events because he had read of exactly the same sort of catastrophe in New England. In his 1644 book, Thomas Weld had warned Baxter of the Antinomians' plague, and the devious manner of their inveigling ill-informed Christians with their "specious termes of *Free Grace*". He provided exactly the kind of rhetoric that Baxter embraced as he launched his own attack on Antinomianism. But more to the point, Baxter also read the sad (and implausible) tale of the Antinomian, Anne Hutchinson, who brought forth "30. monstrous births or thereabouts, at once; some of them bigger, some lesser, some of one shape, some of another; few of any perfect shape, none of all of them...of humane shape". This, of course, was taken as God's judgement on Antinomianism. Just as Hutchinson "had vented misshapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters".¹⁸³

Baxter constantly pointed his correspondent or reader to the sad case of that American precedent. In 1650, for example, he explained to Richard Vines that he had been "much confirmed against [the Antinomians] by gods wonderfull hand upon them in New-England" so that he was "animated and even necessitated" to set himself in opposition to them in England itself.¹⁸⁴ In his *Plain Scripture Proof* Baxter repeated several times the story of those monstrous births and God's judgements on Antinomianism in New England.¹⁸⁵ "And the forgetting them among us", he warned, "is no small aggravation of our sin; That ever old *England* should become the dunghill to receive the excrements of those abominations which were purged put of *New-England*

¹⁸³

[Weld], *Short Story*, preface.

¹⁸⁴

Baxter to Richard Vines, 24 July 1650: DWL MS BC ii. 24r (CCRB #46).

¹⁸⁵

See, for example, Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, pp. 168, 189, 191, 198.

by wonders from God!"¹⁸⁶ Baxter was anxious that England had become just that, and he feared the consequences.

And these were the fears that he shared with Warren. Having read it in Weld's work, it was now Baxter's turn to warn John Warren of the "practicall birth" with which the Antinomians had lately "travailed". Antinomian doctrine explained the civil war, and worse was to come if he allowed it to flourish. For this reason Baxter was determined to uproot the "Antinomian plant" wherever he saw it growing. The nature of his assault changed - sometimes in public, sometimes in private; now in theological terms, then in social and political - but his aim was fixed. Baxter was determined to rescue England from Antinomianism, and so to prevent any further harm. Yet for all their intensity and marked sincerity, Baxter's endeavours were not well received. Generally speaking, his contemporaries showed a distressing reluctance to listen to his voice and to heed his warnings. It was not that Antinomianism remained undefeated, it was just that Baxter's forays against it fell on largely deaf or hostile ears. His efforts were not the force he hoped they would be.

Defeat

To begin with, John Warren - and Anthony Burgess, for that matter - were never brought to see the world through Baxter's eyes. His correspondence with them had little effect on their own opinions. And the *Aphorismes of Justification*, his public endeavour, also failed. It was poorly understood and badly received as once again Baxter was foiled by his own ironies. Far from meeting the pastoral needs for which he

¹⁸⁶

Ibid., p. 198.

intended it, the *Aphorismes* only aroused a storm of controversy which persisted well into the 1650s and beyond.

The most polite element of that contention was a series of private animadversions sent to Baxter in response to his own invitation, which he issued "because of the general noise about [the *Aphorismes*]"¹⁸⁷ Hans Boersma offers an entirely satisfactory overview of them,¹⁸⁸ but a brief description is needed here. At least seven men responded directly to the *Aphorismes*. In some ways the most significant were Anthony Burgess and Richard Vines. They were the men to whom Baxter had dedicated his book, and each was a member of the Westminster Assembly. For all that, "Baxter did not receive the support he was probably hoping for".¹⁸⁹ Both were critical, if to differing degrees. John Warren also supplied some criticisms, as did John Tombes (with whom Baxter also wrangled over infant baptism) and George Lawson. Boersma highlights the esteem in which Baxter held Lawson,¹⁹⁰ but Conal Condren suggests that there was considerable strain beneath the surface of their relationship.¹⁹¹ Still, Lawson's emphasis on politics must have had its influence on Baxter and his political method.¹⁹² None of these animadverters offered anything like wholehearted support for Baxter's book, but Christopher Cartwright and John Wallis showed greater sympathy for his position. Baxter even broke off his reply to Wallis after realising that "he little differed from me".¹⁹³

In general these animadversions responded negatively to the *Aphorismes*, and so too did many others who were either too impolite or disinclined to write themselves.

¹⁸⁷ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 107.

¹⁸⁸ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 33-41.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 39, and Baxter's warm commendation in *Catholick Theologie*, preface.

¹⁹¹ Conal Condren, *George Lawson's Politica and the English Revolution*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 137.

¹⁹² Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 39.

¹⁹³ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 107.

This was a critical audience indeed, and as a result Baxter was bitterly disappointed by the way in which his first book was received. In a very early letter to John Tombes (in September 1649) he expressed his disillusionment.

I have voluntarily bin more prodigall of my reputation in putting out that pamphlet of Justification, which I well knew was like to blast my reputation with most divines, as containing that which they judged a more dangerous error than Antipaedobaptism: and the issue hath answered my expectation: I am now so hissed at by them, that I feele temptation enough to schimse in my discontents.¹⁹⁴

He felt badly let down by his fellow divines, from whom he expected more. He lamented to John Warren that in his *Aphorismes* he was simply trying to destroy the Antinomianism in which he had almost been ensnared, "But, alas poore I, may say nothing without a lash".¹⁹⁵ In a letter nine months later Baxter thanked Richard Vines for moderating the "acrimony" of his opponents. "Concerning the Doctrine of my Theses" he wrote, "far was it from me to expect a ready or generall approbation of them. A placid dissent was all I hoped for from the most of my brethren".¹⁹⁶ But Baxter had not received even that. By June 1651 he had lapsed into sullen disgruntlement. "I resolve to be guilty of such rashnesse no more", he wrote with heavy irony. "If men will teare out the bowells of the Church, let others tell them of it, that can be heard".¹⁹⁷ His efforts appeared to be wasted.

He revealed the heart of the whole problem in a defensive letter to Francis Tallents in 1655: his true intentions for the *Aphorismes* had been misunderstood. He was explaining to Tallents why he had chosen to attack the Antinomians and not the Papists. He would indeed have moved on to attacking the Roman Catholics "if my

¹⁹⁴ Baxter to John Tombes, 11 September [1649]: DWL MS BC iii. 253 (CCRB #21). Baxter made much the same point on the same day to John Warren, DWL MS BC vi. 96r (CCRB #22).

¹⁹⁵ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BC vi. 97v (CCRB #22).

¹⁹⁶ Baxter to Richard Vines, 24 July 1650: DWL MS BC ii. 24r (CCRB #46).

¹⁹⁷ Baxter to Richard Vines, 16 June 1651: DWL MS BC ii. 20r (CCRB #68). For public expressions of disgust, see Baxter, *Confession*, preface, p. 1, *Unsavoury Volume*, p. 5; and Hotchkis, *Exercitation*, [Baxter's] preface.

Brethren would have given me leave, that have so poured out their indignation upon my opposition to the Antinomians".¹⁹⁸ Baxter expected to be commended by respectable divines because he was attacking Antinomianism, but thinking that he was threatening them they responded with opposition. "I intended [the *Aphorismes*] only against the Antinomians", Baxter admitted miserably, "But it sounded as new and strange to many".¹⁹⁹ William Haller describes Baxter's predicament. He sees that

every effort of [Baxter's] all too fluent dialectic [that is, the *Aphorismes*] to draw men away from the antinomian pit of free justification while stopping short of the popish slough of justification by works invited misunderstandings on both heterodox left and orthodox right. He was in the unhappy position of one who in a time of crisis seeks to promote reform and yet avoid extremes and conserve essentials.²⁰⁰

For this reason the debate that surrounded the birth of the *Aphorismes* was more explosive and enduring than it might otherwise have been, and the book had little chance of success.

Admittedly, the work was not a complete failure. For example, John Jackson, a London rector, wrote to Baxter in 1652 to commend him for "that Little-great booke of Aphorismes". "I thinke you have fully answered your owne expression" he encouraged, "in cutting asunder the unobserved sinewes of Antinomianisme, with which I confesse I had like to have been entangled, had I not by the goodnes[s] of God met with such cleare beams of truth in your discourse".²⁰¹ Not only was the truth there to be seen, then, it could also have its desired effect. Baxter would have been most encouraged by the percipience of Jackson's humble letter, but in the early 1650s such generous insight was rare indeed.

¹⁹⁸ Baxter to Francis Tallents, 7 January 1655[/6]: DWL MS BC ii. 172v. (CCRB #286).

¹⁹⁹ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, preface.

²⁰⁰ Haller, *Liberty and Reformation*, p. 197.

²⁰¹ John Jackson to Baxter, 6 July 1652: DWL MS BC ii. 264r (CCRB #91).

There were, though, quite a few who genuinely appreciated the book. In fact, Baxter received a number of favourable letters in response to its publication. Robert Abbott, one of Baxter's oldest correspondents, had discussed the *Aphorismes* with many others while on a trip to London, "and never heard any teneable objections".²⁰² He later wondered what all the fuss had been about.²⁰³ John Howe, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, was also unimpressed with the pamphlet's hostile reception.²⁰⁴ Henry Bartlett, recently a Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, reported a general approval, and urged Baxter to publish more.²⁰⁵ So did a close friend and admirer, John Humfrey.²⁰⁶ John Jackson and Thomas Wadsworth (who shared Baxter's active pastoral convictions) both appreciated the book's clarity.²⁰⁷ Abraham Pinchebecke, a personal chaplain in London, cheerily announced that he had gained as much from it as "any booke what ever that I know of".²⁰⁸ And John Horne, an Arminian, vigorously applauded the *Aphorismes*, and chided Baxter for his reluctance to publish more on universal redemption in the face of opposition.²⁰⁹

No doubt these many correspondents were an encouragement to Baxter that not all was in vain, but even they could not disguise the fact that his *Aphorismes* had fared badly. It was impossible to shut out the "general noise" that had greeted the book,²¹⁰ and whenever Baxter referred to the work in subsequent publications and correspondence he

²⁰² Robert Abbott to Baxter, 7 January 1651[1/2]: DWL MS BC iv. 180r (CCRB #77). Abbott was aged 64; he died two years later.

²⁰³ Robert Abbott to Baxter, 7 June 1655 [*recte* 1654]: DWL MS BC vi. 148r (CCRB #186).

²⁰⁴ John Howe to Baxter, 12 March 1657[1/8]: DWL MS BC ii. 297r-v (CCRB #436).

²⁰⁵ Hen[ry] Bartlett to Baxter, 3 November 1652: DWL MS BC iv. 179r (CCRB #100). Bartlett repeated his request on 30 December 1652: DWL MS BC iv. 178r (CCRB #105); 28 June 1653: DWL MS BC vi. 133r (CCRB #121); [c. late January] 1653[1/4]: DWL MS BC vi. 157r (CCRB #161).

²⁰⁶ John Humfrey to Richard Baxter, 11 May 1654: DWL MS BC i. 193v (CCRB #179).

²⁰⁷ John Jackson to Baxter, 6 July 1652: DWL MS BC ii. 264r (CCRB #91); Tho[mas] Wadsworth to Richard Baxter, 7 April 1655: DWL MS BC ii. 250r (CCRB #235).

²⁰⁸ Abr[aham] Pinchbecke to Baxter, 30 September 1653: DWL MS BC vi. 155r (CCRB #134).

²⁰⁹ John Horne to Baxter, 13 August 1655: DWL MS BC iv. 223r-224v (CCRB #263).

²¹⁰ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 107.

always did so in apologetic tones. Clearly the balance of opinion was unfavourable, despite these notes of encouragement, and he was forced to make some concessions. These concessions, however, were minimal. Most importantly, he never budged over the substance of his doctrine. "For the Animadverters were of several minds", he explained in his autobiography, "and what one approved another confuted, being further from each other than any of them from me".²¹¹ So the effect was, in fact, to encourage Baxter's independent spirit. "God has bin pleased so to order it", he explained in August 1651 to George Lawson,

that my most Learned friendes (who many have vouchsafed me their favourable Animadversions) do differ in many thinges from one another more than any of them doth from me... . It is hard pleasing many men, of many mindes. I will ergo pursue my taske in searching after... Truth, though som[e]time I be forced to leave the beaten roade: (for this is a worke though difficult and dangerous yet desirable and possible): and for pleasing men, I leave that to others; it being not much desirable nor possible.²¹²

Thus the diversity of opinions in these animadversions weakened their collective influence, and for the most part they simply confirmed Baxter in his own opinions.²¹³ These had survived considerable test, at least in his eyes, and this gave him renewed confidence that he had arrived at the truth. "The maine Doctrinalls which I there Assert", he admitted to Richard Vines in 1651, "I am yet far more Confirmed in, then ever before".²¹⁴

So his concessions, when they came, were hardly substantial. Take, for instance, his earliest public confession which appeared in the postscript to *Plain Scripture Proof*, dated 12 November 1650.

Some accuse that [*Aphorismes*] of obscure brevity, some of inconvenient phrases, some of particular Errours; and most, of erecting a new frame of Divinity. My present purpose is (if God assist) to clear in the next what seems obscure, to confirm what seems to be but nakedly

²¹¹ *Ibid.* He made the same point to Richard Vines, 16 June 1651: DWL MS BC ii. 20r (CCRB #68).

²¹² Baxter to [George Lawson], 5 August 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 52r, item #197 (CCRB #72).

²¹³ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, preface.

²¹⁴ Baxter to Richard Vines, 16 June 1651: DWL MS BC ii. 20r (CCRB #68).

asserted, to manifest the consent of the learned to most that seemeth novel and singular, to adde much where I find it defective, [and] to reduce the whole to a better Method.²¹⁵

Baxter's concessions skirted around the edge of significance. And on the greatest charge of novelty and singularity he declared his intention not to concede anything at all.

I can yet find no considerable false doctrine in [the *Aphorismes*] but two or three mistakes in the manner of explicating some truths... . [And] many things are Delivered too nakedly, and briefly wanting the explication and Confirmation which I now see was necessary, but did not then: And there is no great regard to Method through the whole".²¹⁶

These are hardly earth-shattering admissions about an author's first book of over 500 pages. Not only that, the *Aphorismes of Justification* was, for all the criticisms of its opponents and for all Baxter's embarrassed apologies, the one book in which he set out his thinking most clearly. For Richard Baxter it was a marvel of clarity and brevity. If his critics struggled to understand that book, in which the wrangler at Baxter's elbow was mercifully absent,²¹⁷ how did they cope with his later works in which he was so defensive and exhaustive? The harsh response to the *Aphorismes* did nothing for Baxter's writing style. It threw him permanently onto the defensive.

The concessions that Baxter finally offered concerned only the more superficial aspects of his book on which his animadvertisers actually agreed. For example, most of those who responded to the *Aphorismes* were united on one point; they wished Baxter had given the manuscript closer attention and more careful revision before he published it. "Had I known the contents of the book before published", Anthony Burgess

²¹⁵ Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, p. 345.

²¹⁶ DWL MS BC ii. 2r, item #21 (1). There were many occasions on which Baxter expressed his continued approval of the book's doctrine, only conceding a few minor errors, a lack of method and some poor expression. See, for example, Baxter to Richard Vines, 16 June 1651: DWL MS BC ii. 20r (CCRB #68); Baxter to [George Lawson], 5 August 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 85r, item #197 (CCRB #72); DWL MS BT ii. 2r, item #21 (1); Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, p. 195, *Answer to Dr. Tullies Angry Letter*, p. 12, *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to Believers*, p. 22, *Penitent Confession*, p. 25.

²¹⁷ Baxter explained to the young Latitudinarian churchman Edward Fowler that "I write as if many wranglers stood at my elbow, thinking what everyone will say against me", 7 October 1671: DWL MS BC iv. 35r (CCRB #857).

informed Baxter ten months too late, “I would have most importunately urged you at least to have taken more time of deliberation about the divulgation of them”.²¹⁸ And in 1655 Michael Edge wrote a friendly letter to Baxter, but like others he had this “in humility” to say: “I wish that booke of Aphorismes had been more polished, before it came to light; and that you would be pleased to lick that birth into better shape”.²¹⁹

This was one criticism Baxter could live with, and his regular apologies never extended beyond obscure expression or misplaced words. In June 1652 he set out his excuses to Richard Vines. “I do freely acknowledge my rashness in Publishing [the *Aphorismes*] so hastily”. This was occasioned, he explained, by his expectation of imminent death.²²⁰ He also had no friends nearby to check his work, nor any helper to transcribe copies to send to them. Moreover, the “weaknesse and cloudynesse” of his head, a symptom of his continued ill health, caused him to overlook mistakes.²²¹ Baxter made a similar defence to George Lawson, claiming that the book was never intended as “an exact methodicall Tractate or Systeme”, even though that is pretty much what it was, and even though two months later he defended his method to John Warren.²²² Still, he admitted his haste in publishing his theses, “which I now repent of, perceiving it had bin better they had bin stifled in the birth, than be brought forth so Defective”.²²³

Finally, Baxter was forced to admit defeat. The *Aphorismes* had failed in its task.

That I use to mention that Book of Aphorismes as sparingly as I can, to any, being truly ashamed of it (and willingly so publish my self) for its indigested passages and imperfections [and] That when I am forced to speak of it, it is commonly by way of accusations, or confession

²¹⁸ [Anthony Burgess] to Baxter, 3 December [1649]: Baxter, *Of Justification*, p. 161 (CCRB #26).

²¹⁹ Mich[ael] Edge to Baxter, 25 December 1655: DWL MS BC iii. 98r (CCRB #278). See also Robert Abbott to Baxter, 7 June 1655 [*recte* 1654]: DWL MS BC vi. 148r (CCRB #186).

²²⁰ Baxter made this point repeatedly. For instance, see Baxter to [George Lawson], 5 August 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 52r, item #197 (CCRB #72); Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 173r, item #199 (CCRB #74); DWL MS BT ii. 2r, item #21 (1).

²²¹ Baxter to Richard Vines, 16 June 1651: DWL MS BC ii. 20r (CCRB #68).

²²² Baxter to [John Warren], 22 October 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 136v, item #199 (CCRB #74).

²²³ Baxter to [George Lawson], 5 August 1651: DWL MS BT vi. 52r, item #197 (CCRB #72).

of my rashness, and that especially for the distast of some Brethren (which I never dreamt of before hand) I do repent that ever I published it, and so do hereby profess.²²⁴

Baxter decided to pursue his course by other means, choosing “totally to suppress [the *Aphorismes*] and publish a small Body of Theology in its stead”.²²⁵

Baxter did genuinely regret the book, but not for the reasons he set forth. The superficial blemishes were only a minor cause for regret compared to all the trouble it caused. In 1653 Baxter complained to Peter Ince about being “voluminously reproached” by others with their “pettish exceptions”. “And truly”, he went on, “I have utterly suppressed since that offensive book against the importunity of neere 40 letters, so it hath cost me 3 or 4 yeares labour mainly, to write private replies to the animadversions of many brethren”.²²⁶ It seemed never to end. Baxter lamented in 1673 that he had “been forced these 23 yeares to retract it”,²²⁷ and he was still being confronted by the book over twenty-five years after its publication.²²⁸ People just would not let it rest.

Yet even this was incidental to Baxter’s biggest cause for regret: the *Aphorismes* had failed to make any impact on the theological establishment as Baxter intended. He had hoped that by it he might have drawn his fellow divines away from their Antinomian flirtation; instead, they had responded with disapproval. Rather than curing what Baxter took to be England’s most pressing theological and pastoral disease, the *Aphorismes* had only inflamed heated and largely unproductive controversy. Baxter’s mission to rescue England that way had failed.

²²⁴ Baxter, *Unsavoury Volume*, p. 13.

²²⁵ Baxter to John Howe, 3 April 1658: DWL MS BC ii. 200r (CCRB #443).

²²⁶ Baxter to Peter Ince, 21 November 1653: DWL MS BC i. 11r (CCRB #148).

²²⁷ Baxter to Thomas Hotchkis, 4 September 1673: DWL MS BC iii. 129r (CCRB #922).

²²⁸ Baxter, *An Answer to Dr. Tullies Angry Letter*, pp. 10, 12, 74-76.

For all that, though, the *Aphorismes of Justification* remains one of Baxter's most significant works. It did not match the political sensitivity of his *Holy Commonwealth*; neither did it have the chance to outsell his *Call to the Unconverted*; nor did it survive in print nearly as long as the *Reformed Pastor* or the *Saints' Everlasting Rest*. Even so, it had a persistent and often unperceived effect on Baxter's soteriological and literary career. His first work, it earned him a reputation he could never shake off. Its persistence as a focus of debate perpetuated the misconceptions that first surrounded it. Failing to grasp the true purpose of the book and offended by Baxter's apparent attack on their beliefs, his critics accused him of Arminianism while he accused them of Antinomianism. The whole muddle settled down into claim and counter-claim, offence and counter-offensive. Thus the *Aphorismes of Justification*, a product of the tumultuous 1640s, ensured that the 1650s would be no less contentious for Baxter. It might have been largely unseen, but the *Aphorismes* remained in the background during the 1650s and beyond.

After its failure, though, Baxter was left to evaluate other means of making progress against Antinomianism, and he continued to rebuke them in subsequent publications. One undated and unfinished treatise raises the tempting possibility that he quickly contemplated a more explicit printed attack in 1649.²²⁹ This short piece is found among Baxter's 1649 correspondence with John Warren, which suggests a probable date for its construction, but Baxter left it abandoned, implying that his hopes for its effectiveness were low. Its title might have offered further clues, but it is crossed out and unreadable. At the very least it offers further evidence of Baxter's convictions and concerns about Antinomianism at the time of his deepest distress.

²²⁹

It is transcribed in Appendix B, "Undated Treatise", pp. 309-312.

“Of all the Errours”, it began, “that the Church hath bin pestered with in these dangerous times there are few that I could apprehend my selfe clearlyer called out against than those of the people commonly called Antinomians”. The first reason for his intense dislike was that “I lived long on the borders of that evill my selfe”, due to “my fierce opposition to the Arminians” and partly through respect to William Twiss, William Pemble and other prominent divines. A second reason for his abhorrence was his experience of full-Antinomians, who were all “notoriously vile”. He had also observed the “wickednes[s], and satanicall delusions and enthusiasticke madnes[s] as usually the Antinomians are given over to”. Third, “those Monsters in New England speake plainly to the world [God’s] detestation of their opinions”. In accounting for the Antinomians’ lamentable success he pointed to their devious manipulation of the title, “ffree Grace”, and to divines of “great esteeme in the Church” that inclined their way. And there were “too many” who believed them, a thought he expressed several times. Before breaking off midstream he highlighted the three foundations of Antinomian error: a covenant without conditions, justification from eternity and strict imputation. Just one of those errors was like “a serpent that that hath a 100 [others] in its bowells”.²³⁰

Thus this valuable treatise summarises with remarkable brevity and intensity the reasons behind Baxter’s concern, or at least the reasons he put forward for his own intense opposition. They have much to do with the passage of his own soteriological development, the confirmation of his own reading, and his personal experience of Antinomians and Antinomianism in “these dangerous times”. That was the most significant key to unlocking the causes of his concern. The trauma and crisis through which he and England had progressed were caused both by the Antinomians and God’s

²³⁰

DWL MS BT xiv. 1v-2r, item #325.

judgement upon them. It was that intimate link between this “vile” doctrine and the times that invested Baxter’s anxiety with energy, vigour and persistence. As Baxter viewed his world it seemed embroiled in a storm of heresy and infidelity from which it could never escape.

In fact, England and Richard Baxter would recover. Baxter had endured a great deal. He had been shocked by Antinomianism in the army, he had endured his crisis of ill health, he had offered public testimony to the fruit of all that trauma and upheaval, and his correspondence with John Warren especially had captured him at the height of his concern. But that distress (like the disturbance that provoked it) would not last forever. Baxter’s anxiety had life in it yet, but even before he was aware of the fact himself, it was actually on the decline. Baxter’s efforts against Antinomianism had been defeated, but by 1651 he was slowly beginning to lose interest anyway. The flood of apprehension which had burst its banks was being subdued once more, and returning to its normal course through placid waters. By the end of the 1650s Baxter’s disquiet over Antinomianism had dissipated entirely. It had gone, in other words, as quickly and mysteriously as it had come.

Chapter Five

DISPUTES AND DISSIPATION

~ The 1650s ~

I find the world about us generally quiet, all parties having wrangled themselves into a tirednesse, and now I beginn to fear as great an evill as our dissensions, and that is a spirit of slumber, such is the wretchednesse of our hearts, that like children we are either fighting or sleeping.

Thomas Wadsworth, July 1657

I am...glad that controversyes are so much quietted as you express.

Richard Baxter, August 1657¹

In 1649 Richard Baxter was extremely disturbed by the threat of Antinomianism in England; by 1659 that anxiety had dissipated. In 1649 he was haunted by Antinomians; ten years later he was traumatised by “papists”. In 1649 Baxter published his *Aphorismes of Justification*, which would engage his attention for a decade and more; in 1659 he offered his *Political Aphorisms*, which would follow him the rest of his life.² Each of these transformations bears eloquent testimony to the decline of his concern over Antinomianism throughout the 1650s, and the shift in the focus of his agenda. By the middle of the decade the breeze was turning; by the end of it the troubled winds of Baxter’s concern were blowing in another direction entirely.

¹ Tho[mas] Wadsworth to Baxter, [c.July 1657]: DWL MS BC iii. 256r (CCRB #385); Baxter to [Thomas Wadsworth], 14 August 1657: DWL MS BC vi. 214r (CCRB #387).

² This was the alternative title to his *Holy Commonwealth*, 1659.

Disputes

England was beset by a number of problems as it entered the 1650s. Small and distant though they were, the American colonies had been allowed to drift even further from England's control during the civil war years, and they needed to be hauled back in. The frontiers with Ireland and Scotland had to be secured. Ireland had been technically in rebellion since 1641, and both were likely avenues through which Charles II might have tried to retake England. On the domestic front, the nation had to fight its way through widespread depression and the poverty bequeathed to it by the war. It also had to find a lasting political and religious settlement in what was in many ways a new and unfamiliar world.³ England's crisis of authority did not necessarily end with the war.

These problems brought with them considerable tension and uncertainty, but they also encouraged a spirit of experimentation. "England's new rulers walked a political tightrope between the irreconcilable demands of radicals and conservatives".⁴ These tensions were embodied in the personality of Oliver Cromwell, who dominated England's politics for most of the decade. He could demonstrate both conservative and radical instincts, and he was both a country gentleman and a soldier trusted by the army he had risen to command. It was he who was forced to experiment with new political and religious measures, most of them failures. It would be unwise to underestimate his achievement, however, since it was only late in 1659 - when army rule seemed the only alternative - that the English people seriously entertained a return of the Stuarts. In the meantime they had been able to carry on their lives in a way that was reassuringly

³ Bennett, *Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland*, p. 314.

⁴ Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, 1985, p. 15.

normal, despite heavy taxation and the occasional intrusion of the decade's political and religious experimentation.

Baxter was closely connected with many of these developments. Despite the poor reception of his *Aphorismes*, he was gaining a reputation not just as a fierce disputant, but as a conscientious pastor and a sympathetic devotional writer. The competing tensions within his personality were becoming known to a wider range of people, for good or ill. It would be wrong to suggest that even in the years from 1649 to 1651, when the spectre of Antinomianism provoked so many of his efforts, that he was immune from these other tensions. He had sustained his interest in pastoral care and ecclesiastical discipline, for example. The point is that these competing concerns were given greater freedom during the 1650s as Baxter returned to enjoy a successful, pastoral ministry at Kidderminster. Life returned to normal, fears were allayed, and an interesting pattern emerged in his crusade against Antinomianism.

It is not an easy pattern to detect, and none of Baxter's historians has glimpsed its subtlety. Essentially, intense concern about Antinomianism gave way to indifference. Oddly enough, this development began to occur even when his literary output against the Antinomians was gathering pace. Only a paradoxical temperament like Baxter's, so enamoured with controversy, can account for this apparent anomaly. So it is important to demonstrate here both the continuation of Baxter's crusade against the Antinomians in print, and, within that campaign, the dissipation of his inner concern at their threat. A delicate balance is required. And only when this is clear will it be possible to explain the effect of this shift on his own soteriological development, and to describe those other concerns that gradually took the place of Antinomianism.

At this point it is necessary to shape a useful analytical tool. In the decade from 1649 to 1659 Baxter published a considerable number of disputational works that dealt with soteriological issues. These can be divided up into two broad types, which may be labelled “primary” and “secondary”. The primary disputations are those which were published between 1649 and 1653, and which emerged directly and immediately from Baxter’s own traumatic experiences during the late 1640s. They were further attempts to rescue England from Antinomianism after his *Aphorismes* had failed; they were part of the same campaign. His secondary disputations are those which were published after 1653, and which respond to the storm of controversy that his primary disputations had provoked. In other words, they did not emerge from the rich soil of Baxter’s own experience; they were simply the fruit of the misunderstanding and savagery of seventeenth-century theological dispute. Generally the secondary disputations addressed specific individuals and were heavily defensive and often negative in tone, whereas Baxter’s primary disputations attempted to make a more positive contribution to the needs of a much more generalised audience.

Furthermore, the transition from primary to secondary disputations involved a change both in the issues they discussed and in their target audience. Gone were men like John Eaton, Tobias Crisp and John Saltmarsh who explored the implications of justification by faith alone in their practical and pastoral context, and who found such nourishment in the soteriology of Martin Luther. In their place were university men who, while not immune from pastoral concerns, preferred to debate soteriological issues in the more rarefied atmosphere of systematic, intellectual theology, and who identified themselves more closely with the cause of Calvinism. The nature of the issues at stake also changed. Rather than embodying outright Antinomianism, the actors in this 1650s

debate were accused by Baxter of holding those presuppositions which, only in the end, would result in Antinomianism. They were fighting the right battle, but with the wrong weapons;⁵ left uncorrected, their mistake might usher in fully-fledged Antinomianism. Baxter could say of one of his 1650s opponents, Oxford professor Lewis Du Moulin, that "I speak not all this, as putting the Title of Libertine or Antinomian on this Learned man: For seeing it is but some of their Doctrine which he maintaineth here, for ought I know he may not see the Concatenation; and so may be innocent to all the rest".⁶ So outright Antinomianism, and its adherents, were less of a target in these secondary disputations, and the issues under debate were at a distance from central propositions. It was still an Antinomian controversy, but during the 1650s the label was reduced even further in its relevance.

This can be illustrated by a mostly unnamed opponent in these years, John Owen, who was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University from 1652 to 1657, companion to Cromwell, the leading Independent divine and author of the classic Calvinist tract, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. In his *Aphorismes* Baxter had already tackled Owen, whom he considered had "written some passages too near Antinomianism".⁷ The main point of contention was whether Christ paid the *idem* - exactly what the law demanded from every one of the elect, thereby releasing the believer from its bondage - as Owen suggested, or the *tantundem* - an amount of equivalent value - as Baxter believed.⁸ Thus their debate lapsed into the kind of

⁵ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, pp. 163-164.

⁶ Baxter, *Confutation*, apologetical preface. For Lewis Du Moulin's identity see Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 50.

⁷ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 107. See Baxter, *Aphorismes*, appendix, pp. 124-165.

⁸ See Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 44, 245-249; Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, pp. 128-129; McGrath, "Puritans and the Human Will", pp. 195-197.

Aristotelian Scholasticism that Luther had rejected; it had moved on from the Antinomians' earlier, simple adherence to justification by faith alone, without works.⁹

What all of this implies is a gradual change in the way in which Baxter was using Antinomianism. As he moved from primary to secondary disputations his reason for targeting Antinomianism underwent a subtle shift. It responded more to outer provocation than to any inner concern. The label moved from being the expression of his late-1640s fears to being simply a label of abuse, a means by which an opponent could be discredited. There was certainly no clear boundary between these two uses of Antinomianism and there was a fair degree of overlap, but it was becoming increasingly clear through the 1650s that when Baxter used the word "Antinomian" he did so with an entirely different end in mind. The word stayed the same, even its definition was constant, but its function was not.

Thus the fundamental nature of Baxter's attack on Antinomianism changed after 1653, and beneath the veneer of continued anti-Antinomian outrage Baxter's own concern about the doctrine was beginning to subside. It was clearly on the decline after 1655 when England no longer seemed to need rescuing. Baxter's private correspondence bears crystal-clear testimony to this truth, even if his public disputes suggest he was as eager as ever. After 1653 the immediate need behind his anti-Antinomian crusade had passed; it was now a distraction. Baxter's attack was sustained less by his decreasing concern over Antinomianism and more by the inherent nature of these secondary disputations, which tended to string out controversy long after its own relevance had evaporated. Thus Baxter was still turning over the coals even when the heat of his own obsession had dissipated.

⁹ Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, pp. 95-96.

Early on, however, Baxter's primary disputations did emerge from a deep concern for English religion. The *Aphorismes of Justification* is the purest example of a primary disputation. It certainly grew out of Baxter's own experience, and being the first of his many publications it was written in the comfortable ignorance that only naïvety could bring. It was the embodiment of Baxter's anti-Antinomianism, and has already been discussed. The *Saints' Everlasting Rest* was intimately connected with the *Aphorismes*. Baxter began writing this famous devotional work first, and the *Aphorismes* was originally intended to be only an appendix to it.¹⁰ Where the *Aphorismes* demolished the Antinomianism of the age, the *Saints' Everlasting Rest* dealt with its "bewilderment and disillusion".¹¹ "The *Saint's Rest* is professedly a book on heaven", James Stalker comments, "and says much which is true and affecting on this sublime theme. But in reality it is a long dirge on the suffering and vanity of human life. Heaven comes in only as a foil".¹² Baxter's emphasis on rest was enriched by the disillusionment and despair which intrude continually.

That Baxter held the Antinomians responsible for that despair has already been noted, and they feature regularly throughout the work. Very often they are not mentioned by name, but their presence is obvious nevertheless. Louis L. Martz argues that the tenor of the whole book was to recover the process of meditation from the inherent neglect cultivated by England's adherence to (high) Calvinist doctrine.¹³ F. J. Powicke adds an interesting insight:

[Baxter] was neither a thorough-going Calvinist nor an avowed Arminian. He was, however, more of the latter than he knew... . Baxter had come to feel a horror of Antinomianism... .

¹⁰ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 107.

¹¹ Keeble, *Puritan Man of Letters*, p. 98.

¹² James Stalker, "Richard Baxter", in *The Evangelical Succession*, Edinburgh, 1883, p. 242. See also Knott, "Richard Baxter and the Saints' Rest", pp. 62, 64, 75-76, 84, where Knott links the book closely with Baxter's immediate context of the recent civil war.

¹³ Louis L. Martz, "Problems in Puritan Meditation: Richard Baxter", in *The Poetry of Meditation*, New Haven, 1955, p. 156.

There were many around him who encouraged themselves in spiritual laziness, by such doctrine. This led him to lay stress on the human element in salvation... But as often happens in cases of reaction, he went too far.

Powicke goes on to link this insight with the *Saints' Everlasting Rest*. He “wondered if the effect of its perpetual urgency upon simple Christian souls was not inevitably to encourage a feeling of despair”.¹⁴ It is not the only effect over which Powicke ponders. Baxter’s “reiterated insistence upon man’s part in the work of salvation, and especially on the necessity of obedience to the Christian moral law, had much to do with the rapid decline of Antinomianism; and the growth of that ‘moralism’ that took its place”.¹⁵ In other words, the *Saints' Everlasting Rest* played a vital part in Baxter’s attempt to counteract the widespread spiritual indolence that the Antinomians, he thought, had cultivated so successfully. The tone of the book was against the Antinomians, then, and so were a number of passages in which they were the unnamed but unmistakable targets.¹⁶ Even John Saltmarsh received a mention.¹⁷ The Antinomians’ presence and influence were difficult to miss. They were never far from Baxter’s mind, and rarely absent for long in any of these primary disputations.

They were not at all absent from *Plain Scripture Proof*, published in 1651. It seems incongruous to include this work among Baxter’s primary disputations, since it responded to the provocation of a specific author, John Tombes. But it did so on the issue of infant baptism, not that of Antinomianism. Indeed, Baxter had to reassure Tombes that he had not included him or his fellow Anabaptists in his condemnation of the Antinomians as heretics.¹⁸ Throughout the book Baxter’s attacks on the Antinomian

¹⁴ F. J. Powicke, “Story and Significance of the Rev. Richard Baxter’s *Saints' Everlasting Rest*”, *BJRL*, 5 (1919), p. 457.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

¹⁶ For example, *Saints' Everlasting Rest: Works*, III. 206, 287.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 177.

¹⁸ Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof*, “The true History...”, pp. 165-171, 189.

front continued to be made to a general audience, and largely without the distraction of direct opposition and dispute. Thus *Plain Scripture Proof*, at least in terms of Antinomianism, also falls within the sphere of his primary disputations.

It did not take Baxter long to mention his foes. "I dare not sit down in an *Antinomian* conceit, that I have nothing to do but express my Joy and Gratitude", he told his beloved flock at Kidderminster.¹⁹ In his description of the book's genesis he paused to list the main ingredients of the Antinomian recipe.²⁰ And as early as page four he was condemning the "desperate highest sort of *Antinomians* who...will wipe out all the Old Testament with a stroak, [and who] are men to be deplored rather than disputed with".²¹ Not that this stopped him from both deploring them and disputing with them. Apart from his excitement over the New English Antinomians and their monsters he vigorously condemned the theology of "our Antinomists".²² "Doth Christ repent and Believe in himself, and obey himself in our stead? or will any say so save a crazed brain?"²³

Tombes had wildly suggested that Baxter's doctrine bore a similarity to the Antinomians' theology. This compelled Baxter to describe his own doctrine, which was "directly contrary to theirs as can be imagined".²⁴ Indeed it was, and throughout the book Baxter regularly used it to hammer away at Antinomianism. Baxter made it abundantly clear where his interest really lay. "I conceive Antinomianism the most dangerous plausible error that most ever invaded the church", he intoned, "and if you would have given me leave, I had spent this time against it, which I am now by you

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, "To the Church at Kederminster".

²⁰ *Ibid.*, "The true History...".

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 191, 196.

compelled to spend against Anabaptistry".²⁵ Baxter was on a crusade against Antinomianism; this book on Anabaptistry was merely a distraction. Still, Baxter wasted no opportunity, and in its own way the book was an attack on Antinomianism.

In his *Plain Scripture Proof* Baxter was tackling a major theological issue of the day, the appropriateness of adult baptism against the right of children to the covenant of their parents. His *Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience* of 1653 did much the same thing, only over a different issue - assurance. After a period of widespread instability and upheaval the security of a person's salvation became an issue of heightened concern. The Antinomians' careless advice on assurance had appalled Baxter for years, and this book was his chance to refute their views at an important time. He wrote it with three purposes in mind: to help a friend, and, no doubt, many like him; to heed the requests of other divines; and, most importantly, to demolish "the antinomians' common confident obtrusion of their anti-evangelical doctrines and methods for comforting troubled souls".²⁶ That introduced a lengthy condemnation of their ways. "They are the most notorious mountebanks in this art, the highest pretenders, and unhappiest performers", it began.²⁷ Thus the Antinomians were in Baxter's sights continually. "I shall therefore both first and last advise you", he warned, "as ever you would have a settled peace of conscience, keep out of the hand of vagrant and seducing mountebanks, under what names or titles, or pretences soever they seduce you".²⁸

Baxter lived up to his word. The book was from first to last a preservative against Antinomianism in which he used every means of persuasion. He took the

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²⁶ *Settled Peace of Conscience: Works*, II. 886.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, II. 888.

doctrinal approach, outlining their scriptural error.²⁹ He appealed to experience, recalling friends who had been deceived by Antinomianism, and so had fallen from healthy doubts to dangerous presumption.

Sure I am that the sudden looseness of their lives, answering their ignorant, loose, ungospel-like doctrine, did certify me that the Spirit of Comfort was not their comforter; for he is also a spirit of holiness, and comforteth men by the means of a holy gospel, which hath precepts and threatenings as well as promises.³⁰

Thus he discredited the manner of their lives.³¹ If that tactic failed he employed imagery designed to conjure horror in his readers. “To go to antinomian receipts to cure a troubled soul, is as going to a witch to cure the body... . I would not have your doubtings cured by the devil”.³² Despite being (faintly) apologetic for the enormity of his attack,³³ he ended his work on an aggressive note.³⁴ Baxter’s anxiety over Antinomianism, therefore, was clearly in evidence in this treatise, and, sure enough, upon publication it was “much carped at by many of the Rigid Antinomians”.³⁵ The book was yet another tool designed to uproot this dangerous plant.

By the publication of *Settled Peace of Conscience* Baxter had unleashed his full arsenal against the Antinomians. He had assaulted their doctrine, blasted their devotional negligence and battled their reckless teaching on assurance. With this, his primary disputations were at an end. Each of these books was the product of inner compulsion, as Baxter sought to confront the general issues of his day; of the soteriological works that followed none was so spontaneous. Each of those secondary disputations responded to a particular individual, who had provoked Baxter to defend what he had already said. And that is the point. By 1653 Baxter had pretty much said

²⁹ See, for example, *ibid.*, II. 899, 919, 949.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II. 912-913.

³¹ *Ibid.*, II. 919.

³² *Ibid.*, II. 921.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 968.

³⁵ Hen[ry] Bartlett to Baxter, 23 July 1653: DWL MS BC iii. 162r (CCRB #126).

all he was going to say. From then on his opponents merely goaded him into reworking old ground. It was they who provided the immediate need, not his fear of Antinomianism. In fact, that anxiety was just beginning to decline. While Baxter's enthusiastic demolition of Antinomian doctrine continued, there were enough hints to suggest that he was steadily becoming less concerned by the threat of Antinomianism, and at the same time rather more comfortable with clearly Calvinist doctrines. Put simply, Baxter's confidence was growing that he had seen off the Antinomian threat.

This emerges even in the first of his secondary disputations, *Rich. Baxters Apology*, which appeared in June 1654, a year after it had been begun.³⁶ It was made up of five smaller disputations, each against a particular combatant and all but the first discussing soteriological issues *vis-a-vis* Antinomianism. In the preface to part one Baxter explained the need to take up his pen once more:

I was informed of divers others that were ready to write against my Doctrine, and some that had written, and were ready to publish it, and divers others that were desirous to send me their Animadversions. I did therefore apprehend (and so did many learned Friends) an unavoidable Necessity of appearing more publickly, both to spare my Friends the labour of writing the same things to me over and over, which so many others had written before: and to spare my self the time and pains of endless private Replies (which have this three years taken me up, and hindered me from more profitable work).³⁷

This was no mere literary convention. The animadversions on the *Aphorismes* had usurped a great deal of Baxter's precious time, and it is only too plausible that Baxter designed his *Apology* as a labour-saving device. Thus his comment here provides a glimpse into his progression from primary to secondary disputations, and the *Aphorismes* was the bridge. It lay behind the scenes, still exerting an enormous influence on proceedings. And rather than setting forth his doctrine in a positive way, Baxter was simply responding to the responders. This was now his "unavoidable

³⁶ See Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Richard Baxter's *Apology* (1654): its occasion and composition", *JEH*, 4 (1953), pp. 69-76, for an excellent account of the book's timing.

³⁷ Baxter, *Rich. Baxters Account*, preface.

Necessity”, at a time when he would prefer to move on to “more profitable work”. The issues still engaged him, then, but for different reasons and to a lesser degree.

Antinomianism remained an inevitable feature of the landscape in these works, but it had little relevance to the first disputation, against Thomas Blake. For a start, Blake was of Arminian inclinations. Baxter thought “the Transition is verie easie from Mr *Blakes* opinion to Arminianism, if not unavoidable”.³⁸ Second, he appreciated Blake’s book “for its sound discoveries of the Vanity of the Antinomians”.³⁹ And, finally, the issues (eligibility to the sacraments, believing in Christ as king and teacher as well as in His blood, and the instrumentality of faith)⁴⁰ were somewhat removed from Baxter’s ordinary frame of Antinomian reference.⁴¹

As usual it was a question of audience. Thomas Blake was immune from Antinomianism, and he was spared the denunciations. But the same could not be said of George Kendall, a London rector. He had published a book against the Arminian, John Goodwin, which included a digression against Baxter’s *Aphorismes*, and Baxter was quick to respond.⁴² That response demonstrates the changed nature of his disputes. To begin with, he levelled the accusation of Antinomianism repeatedly.⁴³ Clearly, the label of Antinomian was proving to be a useful stick with which he might beat an opponent. Along the way he issued lengthy warnings to his readers as to where Kendall’s theology might lead them.⁴⁴ And the theological issues were much more technical. Here “the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 45-46.

⁴¹ Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis; Or, A Treatise Of The Covenant of God Entered With Man-Kinde*, 2nd ed., 1658.

⁴² George Kendall, *Oeokpatia: Or, A Vindication Of The Doctrine Commonly Received in the Reformed Churches Concerning Gods Intentions Of special Grace and Favour to his Elect In the Death of Christ*, 1653, I. 134-135.

⁴³ Baxter, *Reduction of a Digressor*, pp. 83, 85, 90, 114, 115-116.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90. See also pp. 13, 131-132.

debate surrounding the *Aphorismes* entered some new areas: the question of the eternity of God's immanent acts and the difference between common and special grace".⁴⁵

Moreover, Baxter's attack on Kendall revealed his growing ambivalence about the state of religion in England. He initially explained his willingness to confront even the most reputable theologians if they held to Antinomian error. "*England* hath not sped so well by the Antinomians of late, as that any knowing friend of it, should say, It matters not, when such great Divines promote their cause".⁴⁶ Yet near the end of the book he was clearly more comfortable "in these times, when Antinomianism hath an ill favour with the best".⁴⁷ His pessimism was by no means buried yet, but by 1653 at least there were hints that he was becoming less concerned by Antinomianism's hold on England.

On almost the very same day that Baxter finished his reply to Kendall he received a Latin treatise by Lewis Du Moulin which argued for justification before faith.⁴⁸ Baxter's "apprehensions of the danger of that Doctrine, commonly known by the name of *Antinomian* or *Libertine*, are such as will not suffer me to make light of it", and he was compelled to respond.⁴⁹ His assault formed the third part of his steadily-growing *Apology*. It contained all his usual rhetoric against Antinomianism,⁵⁰ but he was growing "weary" of what was descending into tiresome debate.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 47.

⁴⁶ Baxter, *Reduction of a Digressor*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴⁸ Baxter, *Confutation of a Dissertation*, apologetical preface; Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 50-51.

⁴⁹ Baxter, *Confutation of a Dissertation*, apologetical preface.

⁵⁰ For example, see *ibid.*, epistle dedicatory, apologetical preface, pp. 179, 190-191, 201, 208, 224, 228-229, 241, 248, 255, 262, 285, 288, 311, 321, 322-323.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, apologetical preface.

In an interesting description of his own soteriology Baxter explained how it slotted in between Arminianism and Antinomianism. His Calvinism was hardly rampant, but more pronounced than it had been in the *Aphorismes*.

The Arminians give too little to Christ's death, as well as they do to God's decree...we affirm that as God in electing, so Christ in dying did intend the infallible pardoning and saving of all that are pardoned and saved; but yet that as he did not therefore pardon or save them at the time of his election (I mean from eternity) so neither doth he pardon or glorifie them at the time of Christ's death. It may be procured as a thing infallibly to be enjoyed in its season, that is sufficient against the Arminians, and yet it was not done at the death of Christ, that is your error on the other extreme. You think you honour Christ much by your doctrine; but indeed you much dishonour him... . If you will fly further, and go to Antinomianism, to avoid Arminianism, you will go out of the ashes into the fire.⁵²

Baxter was still responding aggressively to Antinomianism in any form, but he was growing fractionally more comfortable in the presence of some key Calvinist doctrines. In other words, he was becoming less adamant that these doctrines amounted to Antinomianism. Even so, his anti-Antinomianism (at least in public) seemed to continue unabated.

It certainly persisted in the fourth part of his *Apology*, this time against William Eyre's *Justification without Conditions*. In his book Eyre had attacked a published sermon by Benjamin Woodbridge. He also assaulted Baxter, who had heaped high praise on that sermon in the introductory epistle to his *Settled Peace of Conscience*.⁵³ Baxter had commended Woodbridge's sermon as "one of the best, easiest, cheapest preservatives against the contagion of this part of antinomianism".⁵⁴ Thus Baxter was unlikely to remain silent in its defence.

"It is my lot", he remarked early on, "to be troubled by two sorts of men, commonly called Anabaptists and Antinomians, because I was called by God to Vindicate his Truth against them... . But for my own part, I confesse I had a hundred

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 261.

⁵³ Eyre, *Justification without Conditions*, "To the Christian Reader".

⁵⁴ *Settled Peace of Conscience: Works*, II. 886.

times rather encounter with [the Anabaptists] then the [Antinomians]”.⁵⁵ He remarked on the worrying growth in popularity of Antinomian doctrine, especially among the learned. “For it was formerly a very rare thing to meet with a man of Learning or considerable Judgement of that way... . But now Libertinism grows into better reputation. It makes a greater noise in City and Country; yea and men of some name for Learning, are the patrons of no small portions of it”.⁵⁶ In this regard he mentioned Lewis Du Moulin, and probably had in mind exactly the authors he was opposing in his *Apology*. Yet for all this Baxter was able to write with an unprecedented degree of confidence.

I am no Prophet; but I confess I am so confident that the prevalency of this Sect will be but of short continuance, that I do not much fear them. For though nature be ready enough to befriend it, yet two disadvantages they runne upon, that will infallibly dash them all to pieces, as soon as the storm of temptation is allayed.⁵⁷

Antinomianism would be defeated by the infallible work of the Spirit in the heart of Christians against all Libertinism, and by every page of Scripture which witnessed against it. More importantly, though, the “storm of temptation” was finally abating. Antinomianism’s presence in England was on the decline. So also was Baxter’s concern. In this passage Baxter placed much more trust in the ordinary Christian’s ability to withstand the Antinomian assault. He was no longer quite so worried about the inclinations of his general audience. The Antinomians, he was confident, were on the way out. It was a remarkable statement to make, “I do not much fear them”, for they were exactly what he had feared for years.

Even though his concern about Antinomianism was declining, Eyre’s challenge drew from Baxter all the usual noises against Antinomianism.⁵⁸ It had this in common

⁵⁵ Baxter, *Admonition to William Eyre*, preface.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ See, for instance, in this forty-page piece, pp. 2, 5, 6, 8, 15, 17, 18-19, 33, 38.

with the final part of this very long *Apology*, Baxter's response to John Crandon, a sectary of Fawley, Hampshire, and one of Baxter's fiercest critics. Baxter had known about the emergence of Crandon's book, *Mr Baxters Aphorisms Exorcized and Anthorized*,⁵⁹ since August 1652, when he had received word from Henry Bartlett. "That Annswer", Bartlett wrote, "to your Aphorisms by Mr Crandon endeavoring to prove you a flat papist by your Aphorisms, is now in press, and much cryed up by the Antinomian party, as an unanswerable piece".⁶⁰ Bartlett recommended a few words in response. As it happened Crandon's book did not appear until 1654, but Baxter (who had read it in manuscript) heeded Bartlett's advice.

In his book Crandon objected to Baxter's "fraudulent" use of the sobriquet, Antinomian;⁶¹ he questioned the supposed numbers of Antinomians;⁶² and he defended the doctrine Baxter had condemned, claiming it was the essence of Protestant orthodoxy.⁶³

[I]n pronouncing this doctrine of working and performing duties not for life, but from life and salvation, not to the end that we may be justified by them, but in thankfulness for our justification by Christ without workes, to bee an *Antinomian* and damning doctrine if reduced to practice; he peremptorily pronounceth not onely all Protestant Churches and saints, but also Paul himselfe an *Antinomian* and damned.⁶⁴

These observations were not without merit, but his determined opponent was unmoved. Baxter surveyed the terrain of Crandon's work and claimed to detect Antinomianism at every turn, launching yet another fierce rebuttal of that doctrine.⁶⁵ He was aggressive to the end, scorning Crandon's denial of the charge of Antinomianism.⁶⁶ Yet he was also

⁵⁹ Crandon, *Mr Baxters Aphorisms Exorcized*.

⁶⁰ Henry Bartlett to Baxter, 28 August 1652: DWL MS BC iv. 176r (CCRB #94).

⁶¹ Crandon, *Mr Baxters Aphorisms Exorcized*, I. 162, 263-264, 275-276.

⁶² *Ibid.*, II. 196.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, I. 134, 162-163, 277, II. 139.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 138.

⁶⁵ Baxter, *Unsavoury Volume*, pp. 18, 27-41, 44. For other outbursts against the Antinomians see pp. 10, 11, 12, 15, 26, 58, 60, 67.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

hoping to move away from this whole controversy. The plea with which he ended this piece and the whole *Apology* is a mixture of literary convention and sincere conviction.

And for those Reverend Brethren, who have (from several parts) solicited me to forebear further Controversal debates, lest I be deprived of opportunity for more profitable works (whereto they importune me) I profess to them that I take it for the greatest affliction of my life, that I am necessitated to this defensive controversial way of writing, and most gladly would I be at peace, if men would give me leave.⁶⁷

“If men would give me leave”; the whole debate was being prolonged not by Baxter’s inner concern over Antinomianism, but by the persistence of his opponents who constantly drew him into debate, and by the dynamics of controversy that Baxter always struggled to resist. These compulsions, not his concern for Antinomianism, “necessitated” him to write in “this defensive controversial way”. Thus the need for the debate had passed, and that it was kept alive only on artificial life-support by those who had taken the *Aphorismes* so badly.

Controversy continued, though, and Baxter’s *Apology* was followed a year later by his *Confession of his Faith*, which had been in his mind for some time. At the end of the fourth part of his *Apology* he explained his reluctance to respond to John Crandon.

Yet lest thou say I shift it off, I intend God willing, to give thee that which shall be the matter for an answer, to the exceptions of him and many others, even a plain and full Confession of my Faith, and especially in the Point in question: How much it is that I ascribe to man or any of his actions in the work of Justification?⁶⁸

And in the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, Baxter linked his *Confession* to “misunderstanding” over his *Aphorismes*.⁶⁹ So it was, like all his other secondary disputations, a defensive work written against a specific audience inclined to Antinomian tenets. In it Baxter lamented the danger of the doctrine, he described his own theological and pastoral objections to it, and he described what he took to be God’s witness against it.⁷⁰ “These

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶⁸ Baxter, *Admonition to William Eyre*, postscript to the reader.

⁶⁹ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 111.

⁷⁰ Baxter, *Confession*, preface.

Reasons having excited my Zeal against this Sect above many others, I have accordingly judged it my duty to bend my self against them in all my writings".⁷¹ This book was no exception.⁷² Ten years later he recalled that in it he had opened "the whole Doctrine of Antinomianism which I opposed".⁷³

Yet Baxter's solicitude was actually in steady decline by the time he wrote his *Confession*. The book was not written against Antinomians in general, but against some opponents of Baxter who had inclined towards Antinomian doctrines, and who had expressed their disagreement at an earlier date. It was also an attempt to put the *Aphorismes* to rest. So for these reasons it looked backwards to the height of his concern, and borrowed from the flavour of that distress. Moreover, there are indications that he was writing in a much more positive frame of mind. He was relieved, for example, to be able to recommend a range of books that had recently been published against Antinomianism.⁷⁴ He was especially pleased with Constantine Jessop, who had "published a large Epistle to vindicate Dr. *Twiss* from that opinion about Justification [before faith] that I supposed him to be guilty of". Baxter had been deeply concerned by the credibility that had been added to the Antinomian cause by the name of Twisse. Indeed, Twisse had exerted a large influence that way on Baxter himself. It was something of a victory, then, "in taking from the Antinomians the advantage which they seemed to have by the reputation of so Learned a man as Dr. *Twiss*". It was almost irrelevant that Baxter considered Jessop to be wrong in his reading of Twisse.⁷⁵ And it is very significant that Baxter spoke of the Antinomians in the past tense.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷² For attacks on Antinomianism, see, for example, pp. 6, 8, 73, 109, 115, 236, 266, 274, 275, 278, 279, 280, 282, 289-290, 293, 301, 303.

⁷³ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 111.

⁷⁴ Baxter, *Confession*, preface.

⁷⁵ About the same time Peter Ince also tried to persuade Baxter that he was wrong in his interpretation of Twisse, 21 April, 1655: DWL MS BC iii. 179v (CCRB #242).

A similar tone of confidence pervaded Baxter's introduction to Thomas Hotchkis' work, *An Exercitation Concerning the Nature of Forgiveness of Sin*, which was (according to its title page) "Directly intended as an Antidote for preventing the danger of *Antinomian Doctrine*". This book was first published in 1654, and again in 1655. In his preface Baxter was able to suggest that the appearance of Antinomianism had indirectly made a positive contribution to English religion. It was something he could never have said just five years earlier. "God made this an occasion to awaken his Ministers to maintaine more vigorously the use of the Law, the necessity of Faith, Repentance and Obedience, and more clearly to open the nature of the Covenants, and the Reason of Duty, then formerly had been done".⁷⁶ It had certainly awakened him to the importance of the law. Baxter was also pleased to commend a range of books against Antinomianism (including Hotchkis's). Not only that, he was able again to talk of Antinomianism in the past tense, and even to play down the threat it had posed. The

opinions of these Libertines were so carnall and grosse, and their lives ordinarily so scandalous, and the ends of many of them so fearful, that through Gods mercy, it was but very few that were seduced by them; and both they and their reasonings did seem so contemptible; that learned men thought it needlesse to trouble themselves with them.⁷⁷

This was remarkable revisionism for a man who had indeed been compelled to trouble himself with them. Clearly Baxter was in a more buoyant spirit by 1654, and much less anxious about the threat of Antinomianism. He even admitted that "I doe confidently believe, that no one party on earth is so sound in Doctrine, and way of worship, as those called Calvinists".⁷⁸ Finally Baxter could afford to be generous; at last he felt free publicly to own his doctrinal roots.

⁷⁶ Hotchkis, *Exercitation*, [Baxter's] preface.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Baxter must also have been encouraged by correspondence which applauded his work against the Antinomians, and which suggested that his efforts had paid dividends. Early on Robert Abbott thanked Baxter for exposing the principles of Antinomianism.⁷⁹ A member of the Long Parliament and esteemed friend of Baxter, Thomas Grove, was also grateful to him for “vindicating and mainteyning [God’s] truth in this madde and giddy age wherein there are so many desperate opposers and underminers of it”.⁸⁰ John Jackson was especially appreciative of the *Aphorismes*, which had rescued him from Antinomianism,⁸¹ and William Duncumbe, Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge, also encouraged Baxter by saying that his efforts had not been in vain. He had himself been preserved through Baxter’s writings, and so had his university, he believed.⁸² Likewise, Samuel Whittell, himself unknown to Baxter, wrote to thank him for preserving “some Truths of God which for some late yeares seemed to be dead and buried”, and for redeeming him from “that grand destroying Doctrine commonly called Antinomianisme”.⁸³ Various other correspondents willingly added their endorsement,⁸⁴ while Thomas Gataker, who had himself written against the Antinomians, commended Baxter in his work for “the preservation of [God’s] people from those damnable Doctrines, destructive to the very power of piety that are scattered abroad in all places with us”.⁸⁵ There was, then, no shortage of correspondents prepared to affirm Baxter in his stand against the Antinomians. They would also have convinced him that his battle

⁷⁹ Robert Abbott to Baxter, 21 July 1650: DWL MS BC v. 132r (CCRB #45), 29 October 1650: DWL MS BC vi. 114r (CCRB #49).

⁸⁰ Tho[mas] Grove to Baxter, 13 November [1652]: DWL MS BC iii. 170r (CCRB #102).

⁸¹ John Jackson to Baxter, 6 July 1652: DWL MS BC ii. 264r (CCRB #91).

⁸² William Duncumbe to Baxter, 12 September 1654: DWL MS BC vi. 138r (CCRB #201).

⁸³ Sam[uel] Whittell to Baxter, 5 March 1654[5]: DWL MS BT vii. 317r, item #270 (CCRB #222).

⁸⁴ W[illiam] Pynchon to Baxter, 27 April 1655: DWL MS BC iii. 186v (CCRB #244); Mich[ael] Edge to Baxter, 25 December 1655: DWL MS BC iii. 98r (CCRB #278); Hen[ry] Bartlett to Baxter, 4 April 1655: DWL MS BC vi. 112r (CCRB #234).

⁸⁵ Baxter, *Of Justification*, p. 475.

was well worth all the effort and acrimony. Not only that, it was a war he appeared to be winning.

Dissipation

In 1664 Richard Baxter crowed his triumph over the Antinomians.⁸⁶ Despite initial failure, his crusade seemed to have finally succeeded. “But for all the Writings and Wrath of Men which were provoked against me, I must here record my Thanks to God for the Success of my Controversial Writings against the Antinomians”. Of course, there had been those who either misunderstood his purpose or were the targets of it, and were “provoked” against him, but given the extent of the victory all their “Writings and Wrath” were worth it. When Baxter was in the army Antinomianism

was the predominant Infection: The Books of Dr. *Crisp*, *Paul Hobson*, *Saltmarsh*, [Walter] *Cradock*, and abundance such like were the Writings most applauded; and he was thought no Spiritual Christian, but a Legalist that savoured not of Antinomianism, which was sugared with the Title of *Free-grace*; and others were thought to preach the Law, and not to preach Christ.

But this was no longer the case. Secure in the knowledge of Antinomianism’s extirpation, Baxter was now capable of seeing value in the whole experience.

I confess, the darkness of many Preachers in the Mysteries of the Gospel, and our common neglect of studying and preaching Grace, and Gratitude, and Love, did give occasion to the prevalency of this Sect, which God no doubt permitted for our good, to review our apprehension of those Evangelical Graces and Duties which we barely acknowledged, but in our practice almost overlookt.

The Antinomians had served, then, to highlight an omission in the emphases of England’s religion, and that religion had been strengthened and improved - not destroyed - because of it. This was uncharacteristic generosity and optimism from Antinomianism’s fierce opponent, but it was a luxury he could now afford.

[T]his Sect that then so much prevailed, was so suddenly almost extinct, that now they little appear, and make no noise among us at all, nor have done these many years! In which effect

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Rel. Bax., I. 111.

those ungrateful Controversial Writings of my own have had so much hand, as obligeth me to very much Thankfulness to God.

By the mid-1660s it seemed that truth had won out; Antinomianism had been vanquished and Baxter was triumphant.

Baxter offered a rough indication of the point at which Antinomianism disappeared from the scene. Immediately following this passage in the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* he wrote that “about that time” he had preached to Parliament on church reformation. That sermon was delivered on 25 December 1654. Much later, in 1690, Baxter specifically recalled that Antinomianism had been “extinct near Thirty four years”.⁸⁷ That would place its disappearance sometime around 1656, which suggests that 1655 was a significant year in the dissipation of his Antinomian concern. An analysis of Baxter’s correspondence reveals that his references to Antinomianism began noticeably to decline actually much earlier, even as early as 1653. On occasions after that date, for example, when Baxter was practically invited to condemn the Antinomians, he was curiously silent.⁸⁸ They were even unexpectedly absent from a large treatise on assurance,⁸⁹ which provides an illuminating contrast with his earlier *Settled Peace of Conscience*. Given the close link between Baxter’s writings and immediate necessity, this suggests that by 1653 Antinomianism was diminishing as a significant feature of his post-civil war world, and that by 1655 at the latest he had woken up to the fact.

⁸⁷ Baxter, *Scripture Gospel defended*, title page.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Baxter to Samuel Whittel, 9 March 1654/5: DWL MS BT vii. 321r-324r, item #272 (CCRB #223) and Baxter to ?, 16 and 17 March 1654[/5]: DWL MS BT vii. 308r-311v, item #267 (CCRB #225). These were written in 1655 and make no mention at all of Antinomianism, despite discussing soteriological issues.

⁸⁹ DWL MS BT i. 207r-252r, item #11. Unfortunately this treatise, written in response to a request from the people of New England, is undated. Its lack of reference to the Antinomians on the subject suggests at the very least that Baxter was not concerned by Antinomianism in that environment where it had been so soundly beaten, and probably indicates a date in which Baxter’s own concern has dissipated.

It is clear, then, that Baxter's concern about Antinomianism began rapidly to escalate in 1645. His army experiences, coupled with his 1647 crisis of health and soteriological revelation, intensified that anxiety, which reached its height in the years from 1647 to 1651. The regicide and the *Aphorismes* precipitated a climax of concern. By 1653 the decline in his anxiety over Antinomianism was becoming noticeable in private, even if in public he was forced to prolong the debate beyond its period of immediate need. Then sometime during the months of 1654 and 1655 Antinomianism seemed to Baxter to be on its last legs in England, and he was becoming heartily sick of the protracted and unnecessary wrangling.⁹⁰ "I am so weary of disputing", he explained to Francis Tallents in January 1656, "that I have no mind to dispute any more of these [soteriological issues]".⁹¹

So the tide had certainly turned, and by 1657 the Antinomians seemed to have just disappeared altogether. They were "suddenly almost extinct" he wrote in his *Reliquiae*. In 1676 he recalled that "the before-prevailing *Antinomianism* was suddenly and somewhat marvellously suppressed, so that there was no great noise by it".⁹² In July 1657 Baxter received an interesting letter from Thomas Wadsworth.

I find the world about us generally quiet, all parties having wrangled themselves into a tirednesse, and now I beginn to fear as great an evill as our dissensions, and that is a spirit of slumber, such is the wretchednesse of our hearts, that like children we are either fighting or sleeping.⁹³

A month later Baxter could only agree. "I am...glad that controversyes are so much quietted as you express".⁹⁴ "I hope I am past Controversyes", he wrote to John Elliott in the same year.⁹⁵ And in 1664-65 he could exclaim with some satisfaction that the

⁹⁰ See, for instance, Baxter to T[homas] U[nderhill], 2 August 1655: DWL MS BC i. 111r (CCRB #261); Baxter to Abraham Pinchbeck, 12 October 16[5]8: DWL MS BC iv. 56r (CCRB #508).

⁹¹ Baxter to Francis Tallents, 7 January 1655[/6]: DWL MS BC ii. 169r (CCRB #286).

⁹² Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to Believers*, p. 23.

⁹³ Tho[mas] Wadsworth to Baxter, [c.July 1657]: DWL MS BC iii. 256r (CCRB #385).

⁹⁴ Baxter to [Thomas Wadsworth], 14 August 1657: DWL MS BC vi. 214r (CCRB #387).

⁹⁵ Baxter to John Eliot, 20 January 1656/7: DWL MS BC iii. 9r (CCRB #351).

Antinomians “make no noise among us at all, nor have done these many years”.⁹⁶ After all the clamour and contention of the 1640s and early 1650s it seemed indeed that the world was falling asleep. His campaign against Antinomianism was no longer necessary.

But by the mid-1650s Baxter had other fish to fry anyway. His always-narrow focus was shifting, and the Antinomians simply were not so important anymore. To begin with, his interests were being overtaken by a flourishing pastoral ministry in Kidderminster. In March 1653 Baxter commented that he was “in the very beginning of a reformation”.⁹⁷ His successes at Kidderminster would provide a reassuring distraction to his increasingly unnecessary forays against Antinomianism. It was at Kidderminster that he enjoyed the “greatest Fruits of Comfort”,⁹⁸ these “were the best years of Baxter’s life”.⁹⁹ His effort to frustrate the Antinomians was an attempt to promote practical and pastoral values, but in a negative way. In his work in Kidderminster he was allowed the luxury of seeking the same end by more positive and constructive means. He had always desired to work in that way, and he would have done so except for the dislocation of the civil war. By turning to the positive and constructive, Baxter was being deflected from what was necessarily negative.

One measure of this was the Worcestershire Association, created in 1652 around the same time as the Kidderminster reformation began. This was Baxter’s idea - a group of ministers who regularly met together to discuss theological issues, significant cases of discipline and church reformation. It was his attempt practically to counter the

⁹⁶ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 111.

⁹⁷ Baxter to [Richard Foley, jun.?], 19 March [1653]: DWL MS BC iv. 141r (CCRB #112).

⁹⁸ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 20. In 1681 Baxter fondly reminisced with his friends at Kidderminster about his years of success there, DWL MS BC iv. 232r (CCRB #1064).

⁹⁹ Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, p. 48.

sectarian spirit of the age, by bringing together ministers from differing ecclesiological persuasions in agreement over what they held in common.¹⁰⁰ In particular, he hoped the movement might reconcile a trinity of foes: the Independents, the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians.¹⁰¹ It was also an attempt to settle more formally issues of ecclesiastical discipline, which had been left unresolved since the formal dissolution of the Church of England.¹⁰² Not only was it relatively popular in Worcestershire, the idea was also adopted - sometimes independently of Baxter's model - in a number of other counties,¹⁰³ giving Baxter great hopes for church reformation in England and a much more positive outlook on the state of religion throughout the nation. "God is about the healing of our Wounds", he wrote enthusiastically in 1658, "having communicated more healing Principles and Affections, and poured out more of the Spirit of Catholic Love and Peace than I have perceived heretofore".¹⁰⁴ There was much to encourage him, then, and much to occupy his thoughts. This informal network of associations, as well as Baxter's growing reputation as a pastor, generated a burgeoning amount of correspondence. Baxter's opinion was sought on other practical and ecclesiological matters as well, from individuals, ministers and even members of parliament. He also took part in several projects throughout the decade to promote church unity.¹⁰⁵ All of this helped to submerge any residual concern over Antinomianism.

It also brought Baxter and Oliver Cromwell together. William Lamont sees the issues surrounding the Association movement as proof that Baxter and Cromwell were

¹⁰⁰ Powicke, *Life of Baxter*, pp. 163-164; Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 164.

¹⁰¹ William A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and Under the Commonwealth 1640-1660*, vol. II, 1900, p. 165.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 155, 158-162; Powicke, *Life of Baxter*, pp. 168-172; Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 165, ---
Puritanism and historical controversy, p. 48.

¹⁰⁴ *Rel. Bax.*, Appendix IV, p. 81.

¹⁰⁵ Lamont, *Millennium*, pp. 164-165.

“converging”.¹⁰⁶ He traces Baxter’s transformation from detestation of Cromwell to wholehearted support, “nothing less than a full and spontaneous conversion”.¹⁰⁷ “The more successful ‘natural antinomianism’ was held at bay”, Lamont explains, “the more possible it became to envisage positive programmes of moral reform”. Thus “Baxter became increasingly drawn into closer co-operation with the experimental, but more conservative, regimes” which developed during the 1650s.¹⁰⁸ Such a transformation was only made possible by the dissipation of Baxter’s negative anxiety over Antinomianism. Baxter’s “initial objections were as much doctrinal as constitutional, and when the doctrinal objections to the Commonwealth government receded, other features (including constitutional) could be re-examined”.¹⁰⁹ After all, it was Cromwell who had seemed to cultivate the New Model army’s Antinomian infection, and Baxter’s dislike had to be overcome before anything positive could take its place.¹¹⁰ Yet Baxter’s “hunger for discipline” cannot have been “the key to that process”,¹¹¹ because he had always felt that hunger. Instead, the key was Baxter’s opportunity to address that compulsion in positive, and not negative, ways. Instead of attacking Antinomianism for its effect on obedience, he could now promote godly living through parish discipline.

The Quakers were another distraction from Antinomianism, although not so welcome. Four pages after rejoicing over the extirpation of the Antinomians in his *Reliquiae* Baxter recalled that in 1653 the Quakers were “just now rising”.¹¹² In 1655 he wrote irritably to John Tombes, explaining “I am faine to spend my tyme now to

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁷ Lamont, “The Left and Its Past”, p. 144.

¹⁰⁸ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁹ Lamont, “The Left and Its Past”, p. 145.

¹¹⁰ Lamont has also arrived at this conclusion, in *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Rel. Bax.*, I. 115.

endeavour the recovery of some of your opinion who are lately turned quakers",¹¹³ whereas earlier he had claimed that Anabaptists "turn Antinomians and Libertines".¹¹⁴ Characteristically, Baxter's concerned friend, Peter Ince, advised him not to waste his time, as the Quakers were too irrational to be brought to their senses. He at least was aware of Baxter's change of target.¹¹⁵ It was just as characteristic for Baxter not to heed Ince's advice, explaining in 1657 that he was encouraged "the more boldly to do my part in defending the cause of God, against the assaults of all these deluded ones; and particularly the Quakers".¹¹⁶ And many years later he recalled some of his confrontations with the Quakers, "this was in 1656, 57, 58, 59", he confirmed.¹¹⁷ Thus they provided a real distraction from the Antinomians, and another outlet for Baxter's controversial inclinations.

Baxter argued on soteriological grounds that the Antinomians and the Quakers were vastly different groups. While the Quakers did "impudently pretend to a sinless perfection",¹¹⁸ they did not do so in the apparently high Calvinist terms of Baxter's Antinomians. For instance, they "deprave the Doctrine of Justification, denying the imputed righteousness of Christ".¹¹⁹ In Baxter's well-thought-out scheme of things this clearly placed them at the opposite soteriological pole from the Antinomians, so that "in this and many other Doctrines, they do so openly comply with the Papists, that we may plainly see that the Jesuites and Fryers are their Leaders".¹²⁰ Baxter never made that

¹¹³ Baxter to John Tombes, 3 April 1655: DWL MS BC ii. 140r (CCRB #232).

¹¹⁴ Baxter, *Confutation of a Dissertation*, epistle dedicatory.

¹¹⁵ Peter Ince to Baxter, 21 April [1655]: DWL MS BC iii. 179v (CCRB #242).

¹¹⁶ Richard Baxter, *One Sheet against the Quakers*, 1657, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Knowledge and Love Compared: Works*, IV. 602. For the timing and spread of the Quakers see B. Reay, "Quakerism and Society", in J. F. McGregor and B. Reay (eds), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, Oxford, 1986, pp. 141-142; Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, pp. 10-11.

¹¹⁸ Baxter, *One Sheet against the Quakers*, pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8; Richard Baxter, *The Quakers Catechism, Or, The Quakers questioned, Their Questions Answered*, 1655, "To the Separatists and Anabaptists in England". Baxter followed this with

claim about the Antinomians, but he outlined at length the similarities between the Quakers' convictions and the papists' beliefs.¹²¹ "The Jesuites cry up free-will and sufficient grace to all", he explained, "and so do [the Quakers]".¹²² This was an altogether different breed of doctrine from Antinomianism. Baxter's soteriological suspicions were not far wrong. Barry Reay concludes that the Quakers were only too pleased to free themselves from the entanglement of Calvinist, predestinarian doctrine.¹²³ If they were considered "Antinomian" in any sense at all, it was in their perfectionism or egalitarianism, not their soteriology.¹²⁴

Even so, there are some interesting parallels, and significant omissions, in comparing Baxter's response to the Quakers and to the Antinomians. About both, for instance, he expressed a preference for Anabaptists.¹²⁵ He also published disputations against the Quakers, and received an encouraging response to his efforts.¹²⁶ And they even gave a face to the apparent Papist threat to England's stability in the increasingly heated and unsettled years of 1658 and 1659.¹²⁷ The Quakers were not as oppressive to Baxter in the way in which the Antinomians had been, nor did they have such an obvious impact on his soteriology. Even so, they did serve in some measure to displace the Antinomians as a much more immediate source of concern.

The Roman Catholics, or "papists", were another group that served to deflect Baxter's concern away from Antinomianism. Like so many of his fellows, Baxter must

proof of Roman Catholic collaboration with the Quakers. See Lamont, *Millennium*, pp. 47-49, for Baxter's link between the papists and the Quakers.

¹²¹ Baxter, *Quakers Catechism*, pp. 26-27.

¹²² Baxter, *One Sheet against the Quakers*, p. 8.

¹²³ Reay, "Quakerism and Society", pp. 142, 145, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, p. 15.

¹²⁴ Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, pp. 35-37, "Quakers and Society", pp. 161-162; J. F. McGregor, "The Baptists: Fount of All Heresy", in J. F. McGregor and B. Reay (eds), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, Oxford, 1986, p. 61.

¹²⁵ Baxter, *Quakers Catechism*, "To the Reader".

¹²⁶ See, for example, Francis Youell to Baxter, 19 July 1659: DWL MS BC iv. 229r (CCRB #587).

¹²⁷ See below, pp. 223-224.

always have been suspicious of Roman Catholic activity in England, but such suspicions did not dominate his early correspondence, nor did they provide the focus and motivation for any of his initial publications. This changed, however, as increasingly in the 1650s “Baxter was haunted by the cunning of the Jesuits”.¹²⁸ In a letter of January 1656 Baxter responded to an objection from Francis Tallents with an illuminating reply.

If the offence then be...that I chose rather to write against Antinomians than Papists my reasons were these 1. Antinomianisme came neerer me infecting my neere friends and spread among those that were like to spread it through the land. 2. And to write against Papists was to poure water into the sea (which yet I had bin guilty of by now, if my Brethren would have given me leave, that have so poured out their indignation uppon my opposition to the Antinomians).¹²⁹

Attacking the papists was something he desired to do, but he had been distracted by the Antinomians. Now, however, an assault on Catholicism was important for two reasons. Not only would it restore his credibility as a sound Protestant - this had been dented in the wake of his *Aphorismes* - but it was also increasingly necessary, since Baxter was sure that the papists were on the offensive in England.

In an unpublished manuscript of 1691 Baxter offered this recollection:

I remember about 1655 or sooner the Papists inspired two or three new sects among us that cried downe popery: But they held the maine body of Popish doctrines, but headed them all up by the *Spirit* instead of the Pope: But how easy had it bin where opportunity served them to change the Head, and reduce soe prepared a body to Rome.¹³⁰

From his condemnation of the Quakers it is clear he had them in mind at least, but not the Antinomians who had been around years earlier. Baxter exposed the papists’ supposedly devious plans in a letter to Peter Du Moulin of June 1658. “I am the more urgent”, he wrote, for “I am confident the Papists are playinge their game in England as busily this day as they did in times that we accounted worse: and therefore we have but need of helpe consideringe the advantages that our Liberty, confusions and sects do give

¹²⁸ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 48.

¹²⁹ Baxter to Francis Tallents, 7 January 1655[/6]: DWL MS BC ii. 172v (CCRB #286).

¹³⁰ Baxter to John Humfrey, [c.summer 1691]: DWL MS BT vi. 297r, item #206 (CCRB #1241).

them”.¹³¹ Thus there was ample scope for paranoia about popery to capture Baxter’s imagination. This anxiety blossomed in the unsettled months before the Restoration, when Baxter even feared for his life. “I never came in danger”, he whispered surreptitiously in a letter to William Mewe, “till I set against the papists. They do all, that are seene in nothing... . Deare Brother, pray hard, if you would not have popery set up in England”.¹³² There was simply no room in such paranoia for the Antinomians.

What the 1650s demonstrates is not so much the decline in Baxter’s distress, as the substitution of one cause of concern for another. This unease (whatever its focus) was aggravated in times of uncertainty and trauma, such as after the regicide or just before the Restoration, and Baxter’s paranoia at these times was especially acute. Yet it is clear that the Antinomians’ involvement in Baxter’s concerns was coming to an end by the middle of the decade, and others interests and fears were beginning to dominate. The Antinomians were overtaken by Baxter’s pastoral ministry, the Quakers and the papists, and each of these new emphases was inevitably reflected in his publications throughout the 1650s.

Beginning in 1652 Baxter published ten works on church ministry and reformation, as well as ministerial associations. This list includes his famous *Reformed Pastor*, first published in 1656 and still in print today. He also wrote two works against the Quakers, in 1655 and 1657. His first published work against the papists appeared only in 1657, and was followed by four more within two years. *The Grotian Religion Discovered* was one of those works. Published in 1658, it claimed to expose a grand design of uniting Protestants and Roman Catholics upon Arminian and “French” Roman

¹³¹ Baxter to Peter Du Moulin, 18 June 1658: DWL MS BC iii. 127r (CCRB #462).

¹³² Baxter to William Mewe, 6 August [*recte* September] 1659: DWL MS BC iv. 281r (CCRB #600).

Catholic principles put forward by the Dutchman, Hugo Grotius, a design “that chilled [Baxter] to the marrow”.¹³³ Thus Baxter’s new concerns inexorably came to dominate the flood of literature he released. Antinomianism was increasingly irrelevant to these new concerns, and had very little place in these published works.

At first sight three publications appear to contradict this thesis, but they do not. Each is a classic example of a secondary disputation; backward looking and largely irrelevant. *Richard Baxter’s Account of his Present Thoughts concerning the Controversies about the Perseverance of the Saints* (1657) is one such example. This book had its origins in *Settled Peace of Conscience*, in which Baxter had offered less than whole-hearted endorsement to the certain perseverance of the elect. He attempted to dampen down the harsh reaction by adding an apology to the second edition in 1653, and he removed the offending passage from the 1657 edition, but still the controversy was not settled.¹³⁴ His *Present Thoughts* was designed to put an earlier matter to rest.

The same is true of another publication in the following year, *Of Saving Faith*.¹³⁵ In response to the objections of Thomas Barlow,¹³⁶ this work defended Baxter’s contention in the long-since-published *Saints’ Everlasting Rest* that common and special grace were different in degree, not in type. Admittedly this was a preservative against Antinomianism, but it was one he had invoked seven years earlier. Indeed, in the seventh edition of the *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, also published in 1658, Baxter added a

¹³³ Lamont, “Arminianism: the controversy that never was”, p. 50. See also Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, pp. 50-51.

¹³⁴ Keeble, *Puritan Man of Letters*, p. 16.

¹³⁵ Richard Baxter, *Of Saving Faith: That it is not only gradually, but specifically distinct from all Common Faith*, 1658.

¹³⁶ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 50.

similar response.¹³⁷ It clearly revealed where, and when, *Of Saving Faith* was relevant. The Antinomians were hardly mentioned in the entire piece.

Neither were they prominent players in Baxter's *Of Justification*, also published in 1658. In fact, he explained that "I shall not trouble my self here with this sort of Adversaries".¹³⁸ There seemed little point. Once again Baxter was simply responding to the responders in each of the four disputations that made up the book, to Thomas Blake, John Warner, John Tombes and Anthony Burgess.¹³⁹ Moreover, considerable sections of the book were correspondence that had been exchanged right at the beginning of the decade, including the animadversions of John Tombes and Anthony Burgess on the *Aphorismes*. Thus the subject matter of the book finds its roots in the early 1650s, and those pieces written later reflect the absence of the Antinomians from the soteriological scene.

Therefore, these three publications do not indicate the presence of Antinomian concern, and they have very little in common with the spontaneity of Baxter's primary disputations. Indeed, his solicitude, the compulsion behind that spontaneity and his earlier crusade, had long since evaporated. Ultimately the focus of these works was not the Antinomians but his fellow disputants; his goal was to silence a debate for which he no longer saw the need; and the real context of the books was not 1658 so much as the early 1650s.

Baxter always wrote to meet the need of the moment, and this pattern of publications closely reflects the shifting kaleidoscope of his interests and concerns. Such a change inevitably had an effect on his own soteriological position, which adds

¹³⁷ *Saints' Everlasting Rest: Works*, III. 352-354. That response was included at the end of *Of Saving Faith*, pp. 90-96.

¹³⁸ Baxter, *Of Justification*, p. 37.

¹³⁹ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 56-57.

another colourful dimension to his 1650s experiences. In 1645 Baxter lay near the Antinomian end of the soteriological spectrum. In the presence of outright Antinomianism he moved towards the Arminian end of that spectrum. Central components of his soteriology were radically altered - and in some cases reversed - although it would be unwise to say that he ever abandoned his Calvinism altogether. It is true that thereafter his soteriology never strayed very far from that set out in the *Aphorismes* - those reversals were never unmade - but once his anxiety over Antinomianism subsided his soteriological emphasis drifted back towards Calvinism, even though it never returned to its original starting point.

Alan C. Clifford compares the soteriological positions of John Owen and John Wesley, and places Baxter between those two poles of high Calvinism and Arminianism, capturing Baxter's attempt to find a balanced middle way between them.¹⁴⁰ In other words, Baxter's soteriological system was capable of embracing elements of both poles. It was designed to include both universal redemption and infallible election, for example. He tried to make them complementary, not contradictory, as so many of his contemporaries had assumed. In this Clifford is absolutely correct, but his analysis is weakened by his theological approach to Baxter. He is forced to assume that Baxter remained unmoved between those two poles, but this is quite untrue.

Baxter may have steadfastly maintained his loyalty to both universal redemption and infallible election, but what is much more significant is the emphasis he chose to place on those doctrines at different times. For instance, he would have considered it dangerous to emphasise the infallibility of God's election at a time when the audience

¹⁴⁰

Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*.

simply could not be trusted to use it wisely (and Baxter was always a crafty communicator with his audience).¹⁴¹ If the threat of Antinomianism was in the air, such a doctrine was too heady for common use. He might choose instead to emphasise personal responsibility in the use of grace. He was still incorporating both poles within his theology, but his emphasis reflected his context. To borrow Lamont's important insight, historians "ought to be quite clear about when [Baxter] was saying it, and to whom; the emphases change with time and audience".¹⁴² The *Aphorismes of Justification*, therefore, could never be the immutable expression of Baxter's doctrinal position. Instead, his presentation was fluid and flexible, always responsive to his changing perception of pastoral needs. This is illustrated by an illuminating comparison between Baxter's soteriological emphases at the height of his Antinomian concern and those after its decline.

Take for example, this passage from the first edition of Baxter's *Saints' Everlasting Rest* in 1650: when the elect "are called according to [God's] purpose...it be yet upon condition of overcoming, and abiding in Christ, and enduring to the end". Admittedly Baxter warded off Arminianism with the assertion that the condition did not depend "chiefly on our own wills", but this remained very carefully qualified Calvinism.¹⁴³ It was only in the 1652 edition that a clear Calvinist counter-balance was added to the end of the paragraph: "the Event or Futurition of [justification] is made Certain by God's unchangeable Decree: His eternal Willing it being the first and infallible cause, that, in time, it is accomplished, or produced".¹⁴⁴ The qualification, "in

¹⁴¹ Keeble, *Puritan Man of Letters*, ch. 3.

¹⁴² Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 88.

¹⁴³ Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest: Or A Treatise Of the Blessed State of the Saints in their enjoyment of God in Glory*, 1st ed., 1650, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Baxter, *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 2nd ed., p. 5.

time”, still disqualified Antinomianism, but the passage clearly demonstrates either that Baxter was much more comfortable with explicit Calvinist doctrines, or that he felt his audience could now be trusted with such doctrine when they could not have been trusted earlier. It is entirely possible that both of these propositions are true.

Baxter’s *Confession* provides further evidence of a shift in Baxter’s public soteriological emphasis. In 1656 Matthew Poole questioned Baxter on an apparent contradiction between his *Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, where he repudiated supralapsarianism, and his *Confession*, where he appeared to endorse it.¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately Poole could offer no firm evidence for his conviction, but the possibility is intriguing. A more clear-cut example is Baxter’s opinion on the continuity of the law of works. This demonstrates that his own thinking had changed, not just the way in which he chose to present it. In his *Aphorismes* Baxter argued that the law of works “continueth to command, prohibite, promise, and threaten”.¹⁴⁶ However, a few years later, and after the influence of George Lawson, Baxter reversed his position to declare in his *Confession* that the covenant of works was “null and void”. “In this point”, he went on, “I retract what I delivered in my Aphorisms”.¹⁴⁷ Lawson may have done much to convince Baxter of his error, but it is useful to contemplate why Baxter was drawn into that error in the first place. Surely the Antinomians’ contention - central to the definition of the word - that the law of works had ceased could have driven Baxter into the opposite extreme. His anti-Antinomianism, his desire not to give any room at all to the doctrine, dictated his position on the law of works for him. The admission he offered in his *Settled Peace of Conscience* was symbolic of his new soteriological

¹⁴⁵ M[atthew] Poole to Baxter, 27 March 1656: DWL MS BC iii. 39r (CCRB #297).

¹⁴⁶ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 78.

¹⁴⁷ Baxter, *Confession*, p. 101. See Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, p. 269. I am grateful to Boersma for highlighting this shift in Baxter’s understanding.

construction. "My detestation of these destructive antinomian principles, makes me to run out further against them than I intended".¹⁴⁸ His anxiety drove him further than was wise, but in the absence of that detestation he was able to moderate and soften his stated soteriological position.

He could even reverse his emphases when his audience was not in danger of Antinomian infatuation. This had always been true in his correspondence with individuals, but not in his public writing for a general audience. In 1655, however, Thomas Hotchkis offered this intriguing insight:

I shal earnestly also request you, that you would a little explaine unto mee your opinion about Christs dying for us not onely *nostro bono* [for our benefit], but also *nostro loco* [in our place] in opposition to the Socinians, and yet not *nostro loco* in opposition to the Antinomians.¹⁴⁹

Unfortunately Hotchkis offered no context for his request, and Baxter's reply is not extant. It is not implausible, though, that Baxter did alter his accent considerably when fixing his targets on the opposite extreme from Antinomianism. Hotchkis' observation was all too consistent with the pattern of Baxter's shifting soteriological emphases.

The best example of Baxter's renewed Calvinist emphasis is his *Treatise of Conversion*, published in 1657. What is so remarkable is not so much the tenor of his doctrine, as he had never really lost sight of these truths, but the freedom with which he felt he could express them, especially when he wrote the book for "the grossly ignorant and ungodly".¹⁵⁰ Baxter began by explaining - and Luther would have agreed - that a person's soul was naturally corrupt, "prone to evil and backward to good".¹⁵¹ It was for this reason that

God, as the most laudable, principal cause, doth cause man's will to turn itself. So that conversion actively taken, as it is the work of the Holy Ghost, is a work of the Spirit of Christ,

¹⁴⁸ *Settled Peace of Conscience: Works*, II. 921.

¹⁴⁹ Tho[mas] Hotchkis to Baxter, 5 September 1655: DWL MS BC v. 61r (CCRB #268).

¹⁵⁰ *Treatise of Conversion: Works*, II. 397.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II. 403.

by the doctrine of Christ, by which he effectually changeth men's minds, and heart and life... . The most laudable, principal cause is the Holy Ghost, who is the sanctifier of the elect.¹⁵²

Baxter went on at great length to describe the Spirit's "effectual" work on the sinful soul in terms which emphasised the passivity of the individual in the whole process of conversion, a kind of passivity the Antinomians had earlier promoted. People do not change their affections, for example, the change "is made upon the affections".¹⁵³ It is impossible to imagine that he would have offered such a sermon to "the ignorant and ungodly" in the days of his great concern about Antinomianism. It would have been giving them too much rope with which to hang themselves, but in these more positive and confident years Baxter felt he could trust his audience with a message that he had never really abandoned; he had just altered his emphases, radically.

This renewed Calvinist fervour broke forth in a number of other works as well. In *Crucifying the World by the Cross of Christ* (1658), for example, he offered this advice:

Consider, it is Christ, and not you, that revived your souls when you were dead in sin, and crucified you to the world, to which you were alive... . Now you are made alive, you cannot keep yourselves alive... . Yea, further, you cannot [make use of grace] yourselves, so neither can you go to Christ yourselves, for strength to do them. You will not so much as move a hand, or lift up your voice to cry for help.¹⁵⁴

The extent of the believer's passivity is breathtaking, but it was a freedom he could never have offered to an audience inclined to Antinomianism. He had laboured to avoid this emphasis in those years of solicitude, but in the late 1650s his enthusiasm was irrepressible. In his *Directions and Persuasions for a Sound Conversion*, also published in 1658, he wrote that "God is pleased by effectual grace to draw [the elect] to his Son, and make the gospel successful to their conversion, insuperably teaching and changing

¹⁵²

Ibid.

¹⁵³

Ibid., II. 419.

¹⁵⁴

Crucifying the World by the Cross of Christ: Works, III. 568.

them by his Spirit".¹⁵⁵ By the late 1650s Baxter's Calvinism seemed to be everywhere in profusion; it was only then that he could trust his audience with it. When the exaltation of common grace alone was the prevailing threat (in Quakerism and popery) Baxter felt free to respond with renewed emphasis on special grace and the infallible work of God in justifying the elect.

For all this shift in emphasis, though, Baxter never again became a friend of Antinomianism, even if his anxiety over it had declined. Indeed, he was still quite capable of the odd outburst against it. In *Now or Never* (1662) he asked, "can we already forget what abundance of Antinomian teachers were among us, that turned out the very doctrine of practical diligence...as a legal, dangerous thing?"¹⁵⁶ There was the occasional reference to their abuse of assurance or free grace.¹⁵⁷ And in *Catholic Unity* (1660) he mustered the energy for a lengthy condemnation of their doctrine.¹⁵⁸ Yet these sporadic references were not nearly as frequent or as heated as they had been. Times had changed.

Indeed, Baxter had experienced a remarkable few years. He had been closely involved with the intense disturbance of the civil war, and he had finally settled comfortably into the promising moral atmosphere of the Protectorate. During this time two complementary soteriological developments occurred. The first is in the way he expressed his soteriology in public. In 1649 he could not trust his audience with unguarded Calvinism, but as the 1650s progressed he felt much freer to do so. This change reflected a new perception of his audience; the Quakers, who denied any

¹⁵⁵ *Directions and Persuasions to a Sound Conversion: Works*, II. 618

¹⁵⁶ *Now or Never: Works*, II. 569.

¹⁵⁷ See, for instance, *Mischiefs of Self-Ignorance: Works*, II. 856, *Unreasonableness of Infidelity: Works*, II. 274.

¹⁵⁸ *Catholic Unity: Works*, IV. 658-659.

imputation of Christ's righteousness, were now the threat. But it also revealed a subtle alteration in his own thinking. Baxter was always strong-minded in his convictions, but this does not mean that those convictions were immune to change. His soteriology was never really fixed to begin with, but he had (in the 1640s) moved from near the Antinomian end of his soteriological scale towards Arminianism, then back again (in the 1650s) to a position slightly more consonant with his earlier Calvinism. All of this suggests, in other words, a fundamental connection between outside events, internal fears and soteriological understanding. The focus of each element of this combination was Antinomianism; it provided the common denominator in each set of developments. This seems simple enough, but the mysterious fact is that it was never the threat Baxter had supposed it to be. He was dealing in perception, not reality.

All this is illuminated by the analysis of Kai Erikson and J. C. Davis. Erikson, it will be remembered, argues that communities need to re-establish their moral boundaries after "a realignment of power within the group" or following "a period of unsettling historical change".¹⁵⁹ They do this by delineating deviant behaviour.¹⁶⁰ J. C. Davis makes good use of Erikson's analysis in applying it to mid-seventeenth-century English society, which possessed "a great deal for groups and individuals to be anxious about and, as always, they sought to resolve those anxieties as and where they could".¹⁶¹ This was particularly so in the two years following the regicide - if the king could be killed, surely anything was now possible! - and the Ranter myth provided the means of resolution.¹⁶² By describing what was out, people could also define what was in. Baxter did much the same thing. His experience demonstrates how this process of delineating

¹⁵⁹ Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, pp. 68, 70.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.

¹⁶¹ Davis, *Fear, Myth and History*, p. 99.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

moral boundaries worked not just in the community, but in an individual within that community.

Thus the analysis of Erikson and Davis explains a great deal. To begin with, Baxter's concern with Antinomianism and England's more general fear of the Ranters peaked in exactly the same years, 1649-1651. It is not unreasonable to see some correlation between the two phenomena. Moreover, Baxter believed that Antinomianism denied obedience to Christ as king, undermined the force of the law, and posed a very real threat to the stability and integrity of everyday social relations; so it is no surprise that he linked it to the civil war and regicide. These years, to borrow from Erikson, certainly constituted a "realignment of power" and "a period of unsettling historical change". At such a time Antinomianism, as mysterious and unfortunate as its appearance seemed to be, emerged as "an uninvited, perverse thrust at the very heart of the community".¹⁶³ This reflects Baxter's need to protect that which he valued from that which he feared, and it explains his overreaction to Antinomianism. He was prompted anxiously to overestimate its numbers, significance and ambitions.

Furthermore, this analysis also accounts for the inverse similarity, the "reflected image", of Baxter's own soteriological position (one which enshrined duty, law and obedience) in Antinomianism (which apparently did not). It explains the vehemence with which he condemned a doctrine which simply asserted that works should be performed from life, not for it. Wide gulfs at the time seem like split hairs to later observers.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, the analysis of Erikson and Davis makes sense of Baxter's uncharacteristic misinterpretation of another doctrine, aggravated in part by his recognition that Antinomianism was the potential outworking of his own theology. And

¹⁶³ Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, p. 22.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

finally, it also accounts for Baxter's transferral of concern from the Antinomians to the Quakers and then the papists as a threat to society. English society had, relatively speaking, become ordered, so there was no longer any need for Antinomianism to explain its disorder. Baxter's potential for anxiety - which may not necessarily have deepened at all in these years - had simply made a natural deviation in its course and swept him off in another direction.

Antinomianism was never the threat Baxter took it to be, and his overreaction sheds light on his inner fears and compulsions. In these traumatic and uncertain years he felt threatened. He felt that much - such as universal redemption - was in danger of being lost. Those values he had come to hold dear, ones which warded off the distress around him, were apparently jeopardised. This was all the more urgent, because, unlike the papists and Quakers, the Antinomians were the enemy within. The tradition which Baxter struggled to preserve was being infiltrated and undermined in the most devious way, it seemed. Familiar words and ideas (such as "free grace") had become corrupted in their meaning, and England's godly ministry had been subverted by the strident voice of the church's own members.¹⁶⁵ The Antinomians aroused a more insidious sort of fear than that of the papists and Quakers, who could at least be met by a unified Protestant front. In this light the Antinomians' claim to preserve true Protestant doctrine required more vigorous attack.

And once that victory seemed to be won, once the enemy within had been vanquished, Baxter's concern had fulfilled its purpose. It had met the immediate need, and was discarded. There were clear indications of this during the 1650s, when the label of Antinomianism became increasingly a rhetorical device. Given that

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DWL MS BT xiv. 1v, 2r, item #325.

Antinomianism existed mainly in the eye of the beholder, its use was always more revealing of the accuser than the accused, and its purpose was always functional. During the 1640s and 1650s the function that Antinomianism performed for Baxter altered. Initially a means of isolating and resolving a set of inner fears, in the end it became yet another polemical weapon in the arsenal of this compulsive disputant.

Eventually Baxter ceased to use the word at all - as its purposes became redundant - but not forever. During the 1670s Baxter launched another campaign against Antinomian doctrine, and in the early 1690s his concern flared for a third time. Each of these occurrences sheds further light on Baxter's hostility to Antinomianism, the purposes it served, his own soteriological understanding and the fears and compulsions at work in his personality. It remains to explain, then, how Antinomianism had life in it yet.

Chapter Six

RECRUDESCENCE

~ The Later Seventeenth Century ~

I see the corrupting Design is of late grown so high, that what seemed these Thirty Four Years suppressed, now threateneth as a torrent to overthrow the Gospel... . And therefore I dare neither give them my Name, nor be silent in such a common scandal and danger, while I can speak or write.¹

Richard Baxter's handling of Antinomianism during the 1640s and 1650s shows once again just how flexible the word could be. Initially, Antinomianism - the polemical construct of his own invention - communicated a set of inner concerns that were tied to the drama and upheaval of the civil war. However, as these concerns faded, and as Baxter's world settled down into some sort of stable routine, the same word slowly metamorphosed into a blunt weapon with which he might beat an opponent. Baxter's experience after the Restoration further clarifies these two functions of the same word. During the 1660s, Baxter published no works against the Antinomians; in the decade that followed he published a number of such works, in which he used the word as a polemical device. During the late 1670s and 1680s, he again was silent against the Antinomians; in the early 1690s he released a

¹ Richard Baxter, *A Defence of Christ, And Free Grace: Against the Subverters Commonly Called, Antinomians or Libertines*, 1690, To the Reader. In *Scripture Gospel defended*.

collection of books against them, in which the word reflected a set of inner fears that, once more, were tied with those of England's mid-century crisis of authority. In these two discrete periods of acute anti-Antinomianism the process from fear to polemic was reversed. What all of this means is that Baxter's response to Antinomianism after the Restoration is just as revealing as that which came before it.

The 1670s

By the end of the 1650s few people looked kindly on Antinomian doctrine. Of course, few people clearly understood its true nature, and this only made it more unpopular. Arminians and Calvinists alike had distanced themselves from its ideals; it was increasingly out of step with fast-moving theological developments; the civil war had aroused suspicions about its intentions; and it had been caught up in the complex denominational rivalry between Presbyterians and Independents. Along the way its voice had been muffled, its message had been misunderstood, and its fortunes were sinking fast. The Restoration only made things worse for Antinomianism, as each of these hostile trends was intensified. After the failure of the Commonwealth and Protectorate the English looked with even less approval on any remaining vestiges of radical religion; if any soteriology was in favour with the new establishment it was Arminianism; the feud between the Presbyterians and Independents continued to simmer, despite their being thrust together as Nonconformists;² and the rise of moralism carried on apace.

² Spurr, "From Puritanism to Dissent", p. 256.

Indeed, this emergence of a “new theology” - a “moral theology” repelled by Antinomian doctrines of justification by faith alone and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the elect - did most to marginalise Antinomianism even further. In it strings were attached to the gospel offer; ethics and morality were married to faith. “The emergence of a body of Anglican moral theology in the mid-seventeenth century”, John Spurr writes, “was an important indication of prevailing theological trends”.³ In general,

predestinarian Calvinism was being undermined by two related factors. One was the distaste felt by many educated people for a theological system which was highly speculative, peering into the hidden decrees of God... . The other factor was pastoral. Sinners were reluctant to respond to a message which seemed to assert their inability to influence their own eternal fate... . [Nonconformists] preferred a simple moralising message to the abstruse doctrines of Calvinism.⁴

Thus moralistic theology replaced Calvinistic speculation.

Martin Luther - who had never been the dominant figure anyway - was banished along with Calvin. “There was no celebration of the bicentennial of Luther’s birth in England”, J. Wayne Baker observes wryly. “In fact, by 1683 the very idea of justification *sola fide, sola gratia* was in bad repute”.⁵ Luther’s “entire doctrine” rested on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer on account of his faith, but such a doctrine was out of favour in Restoration England.⁶ “Luther’s theology of justification was largely either rejected or misunderstood by the bicentennial of his birth”, unable to resist this “trend towards moralism”.⁷

These developments were consummated in later-seventeenth-century Latitudinarianism, a moralistic style of theology championed by leading churchmen such as Archbishop John Tillotson and Bishops Edward Stillingfleet, Simon Patrick and

³ Spurr, *Restoration Church*, pp. 303-305.

⁴ Spurr, “From Puritanism to Dissent”, pp. 261-262.

⁵ Baker, “Battle for Luther”, p. 115.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 133.

Gilbert Burnet. Generally, the Latitudinarians promoted an emphasis on morality and reason, a minimalist creed and ecclesiastical comprehension.⁸ They inevitably disliked Antinomianism.⁹ As a result the Latitudinarians shunned an earlier emphasis on predestination, and, without lapsing into Socinianism, preferred to promote the believer's own preparation for grace.¹⁰

Antinomianism found itself even further on the fringe in this new theological and ecclesiastical climate. C. F. Allison concludes that it cast a dark shadow over most of the theology written in the Restoration period, so much so that "[s]eventeenth-century teaching concerning the Gospel cannot be separated from antinomianism and the fear of it".¹¹ It maintained a presence, then, but largely as a misunderstood figment of the imagination.

[T]here can be no doubt that, by the Restoration, the fear of antinomianism had seriously distorted Anglican perceptions and representations of Calvinism. Although antinomianism...was espoused by a mere handful in the 1640s, and although the practical antinomianism of the Ranters was mainly a bogeyman raised by their enemies, there was enough smoke for Anglicans to claim a Calvinist fire. After the Restoration, it became increasingly tempting for churchmen to bracket the fanatic with the sober Nonconformist and to portray Dissent as a single enthusiastic, schismatic sect with a common cant of extravagant antinomianism.¹²

Antinomian theology was not just distasteful to this "new breed of churchman",¹³ then, but also to those unhappy nonconformists to whom it was imputed. It had never been wildly popular, but Antinomian doctrine stood no chance of success in the Restoration period.

⁸ Martin J. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England*, Leiden, 1992, p. 43; William P. Spellman, "Archbishop John Tillotson and the Meaning of Moralism", *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 56 (1987), p. 404, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England 1660-1700*, Athens, 1993, pp. 7, 80, 97, 157-158. For an excellent discussion of the soteriological issues involved, see Rivers, "Grace, Holiness, and the Pursuit of Happiness", pp. 48-69.

⁹ Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, p. 125; Spellman, "John Tillotson", p. 417.

¹⁰ Spellman, *Latitudinarians*, pp. 95-96, 100.

¹¹ Allison, *Rise of Moralism*, p. 194.

¹² Spurr, *Restoration Church*, p. 321.

¹³ *Ibid.*

This seventeenth-century “rise of moralism” and its implications for Antinomianism are simple enough to detect; it is much more difficult to assess Baxter’s contribution to it. Some writers credit him with an important role in its victory. His *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, so F. J. Powicke believes, “had much to do with the rapid decline of Antinomianism; and with the growth of that ‘moralism’ that took its place”.¹⁴ Isobel Rivers suggests that Baxter had a “crucial involvement” in the mid-century move away from Calvinist theology,¹⁵ and Allison also offers Baxter an important place in the eventual triumph of moralism.¹⁶ In a similar way Alan C. Clifford contends that “Baxter’s contribution to the ‘down-grade’ from Calvinism to rationalistic Arminianism and Unitarianism is seldom questioned”.¹⁷ And Karl Weintraub sees Baxter as “a link to the Enlightenment”.¹⁸ These are bold claims, but in the end it is impossible to gauge how much effect Baxter really had on contemporary debate. He shared some of the convictions of the Latitudinarians - with important exceptions¹⁹ - and he certainly offered lengthy contributions against Antinomian doctrine in favour of one that enshrined a place for duties and obedience, but assessing the impact of these contributions remains a difficult task.

After 1660, then, the prospects for Antinomianism were bleak indeed, but its defeat was neither easy nor immediate. As it happens Baxter was forced to resurrect his earlier crusade against Antinomianism when his mid-1660s victory speech proved to be premature. The uses of his campaigns and the nature of his concerns reveal similarities

¹⁴ Powicke, “Story and Significance”, p. 460.

¹⁵ Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, p. 124.

¹⁶ Allison, *Rise of Moralism*, ch. 8.

¹⁷ Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, pp. 134-135. Iain Murray makes the same observation, “Richard Baxter - ‘The Reluctant Puritan?’”, p. 19.

¹⁸ Weintraub, “Bunyan, Baxter, and Franklin”, p. 251.

¹⁹ Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, pp. 124, 151, 161, 163. Baxter’s “middle way” between Calvinism and Arminianism was certainly different from that of the Latitudinarians, Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, p. 125.

with his earlier endeavours, and his post-Restoration experiences were part of the same story. This has as much to do with continuities from before and after the Restoration as the fact that the English could not put the memories (and fears) of their mid-seventeenth-century crisis behind them so easily. It was not just the Latitudinarians who objected to Antinomianism's renewed presence, so too did Baxter.

But not in the 1660s. During that decade Baxter did not publish one work against Antinomianism. A steady diet of outrage against its proponents was replaced by a few scattered crumbs of disquiet. The silence was deafening. This was all the more surprising, since Baxter was the man who professed to have "judged it my duty to bend my self against them in all my writings".²⁰ Clearly in the 1660s this was no longer the case. The steady diversion away from the issue of Antinomianism which had taken place the 1650s had reached its logical conclusion. By 1660 at least, with the English world seemingly back in place, Antinomianism was the least of Baxter's worries.

That changed dramatically in 1670 with the publication of his *Life of Faith*, a considerable expansion on a sermon which had been preached before Charles II and published in 1660. The Antinomians were absent from the 1660 kernel, but Baxter's antipathy towards them percolated through the 1670 addition. By then he was prompted worriedly to instruct his readers on "how to exercise faith about pardon of sin and justification".²¹ "The errors hereabout", he fretted, "are swarming in most quarters of the land, and are like to come to the ears of most".²² England's soteriological pendulum, it seemed, had swung again.

And we are now so fortified against the popish and Socinian extremes, and those whom I am now directing to live by faith are so settled against them, that I think it more necessary...to open

²⁰ Baxter, *Confession*, p. 4.

²¹ *Life of Faith: Works*, III. 667.

²² *Ibid.*

at this time the method of false doctrines on the other extreme, which for the most part is it which constituteth antinomianism, though some of them are maintained by others.²³

Once again Baxter engaged himself in soteriological controversy, and once more he proclaimed his reluctance to do so. "If the leprosy arise, the priest must search it, and the physician must do his best to cure it, notwithstanding their natural averseness to it".²⁴ But at the time there was "so much poison served up under the name of justification and free grace", he reasoned, "that I should be unfaithful if I did not discover it".²⁵ And discover it he did.

Baxter exposed a "heap of errors",²⁶ comprising no less than fifty-eight misguided soteriological assertions.²⁷ They were all Antinomian, and for years to come Baxter would direct his readers to this passage as an important assault on Antinomianism.²⁸ Not surprisingly, then, these errors were a familiar litany against Baxter's conception of English Antinomianism: he attacked strict imputation; he asserted that sins were punishable in the elect; he denied justification from eternity, justification *in foro conscientia*, absolute pardon and one-off justification; and he asserted that repentance was a condition of justification that could serve as a prop to the believer's assurance.²⁹ "Take heed", he warned in conclusion, "of all the antinomian doctrines before recited, which, to extol the empty name and image of free grace, do destroy the true principles and motives of all holiness and obedience".³⁰ The whole

²³ *Ibid.*, III. 672.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, III. 667.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, III. 672.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 667.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 672-684.

²⁸ See, for example, Baxter, *How Far Holinesse Is The Design Of Christianity. Where the Nature of Holiness and Morality is opened, and the Doctrine of Justification...partly cleared*, 1671, p. 20, *Defence of Christ and Free Grace*, p. 2.

²⁹ *Life of Faith: Works*, III. 672-684.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, III. 687.

lengthy denunciation was Baxter's classic anti-Antinomianism revisited; the echoes of the 1650s, it seems, were ringing loudly in his ears.

Baxter's *Life of Faith*, with its robust assault on Antinomianism, was something of a surprise, coming as it did after a decade and more of silence on the issue, and just six years on from Baxter's triumph over its extinction.³¹ It is difficult to account for the recrudescence of Baxter's anti-Antinomianism in his *Life of Faith*, but it is not impossible. The place to begin, though, is not with the Antinomians, and not in the 1670s. The seeds of Baxter's revived anti-Antinomianism were sown in the late 1650s, and they had everything to do with the Independents.

Baxter's relationship with the Independents had never been a model of mutual admiration, and three events in 1658, 1659 and 1660 only added further strain. Together, these events in particular had a bearing on the 1670s context in which Baxter's renewed Antinomian agitation occurred. The first of these was the Savoy Conference, held by the Independents from 29 September to 12 October, 1658. The formal declaration which emerged from that conference officially set out for the first time the doctrine and practice of the Congregational churches. Two facets of that declaration disturbed Baxter. First, in its chapter on justification it affirmed that the elect were justified only by the work and righteousness of Christ, without any "Evangelical obedience" of their own.³² It was a position dangerously close to Antinomianism. That was bad enough, but the Conference also decided "that a 'deeper discoverie' was needed of communicants than Baxter's profession of visible faith".³³ In other words, access to the sacraments was strictly guarded; only those who could relate

³¹ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 111.

³² A. G. Matthews (ed.), *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 1959, pp. 90-91; *Rel. Bax.*, I. 104.

³³ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 171. See Matthews, *Savoy Declaration*, pp. 123-124.

their conversion experience were admitted. Baxter had hoped for a policy that was much less rigorous and exclusive, but the Savoy Declaration appeared to establish Independency in rigid sectarianism and narrowness of spirit.³⁴

In the context of the late 1650s Baxter was more distressed by the Independents' exclusive ecclesiological strictures than their flirtation (in his eyes) with Antinomianism. Throughout the decade Baxter's passion for church unity had been steadily increasing, along with his freedom (from the Antinomian distraction) to pursue it. William Lamont has shown Baxter's growing affection for Oliver Cromwell as a godly magistrate who could facilitate that unity.³⁵ In the late 1650s Baxter's hopes were high, but they were soon dashed, first by Cromwell's death in early September 1658, and then by this declaration of the Savoy Conference just a few weeks later. "Baxter's reaction to the Declaration", Lamont rightly explains, "was an appalled one"; it "cruelly terminated" his hopes for an understanding between the Presbyterians and the Independents. Moreover, the Declaration was also "a collective slap in the face to Baxter from a formal body. It cast doubt upon the substance of the achievement in co-operation which had been painfully built up in the past few years through the Association of Ministers".³⁶ Baxter's carefully nurtured dreams of Christian collegiality were spurned and defeated.

Naturally, Baxter's response was gloomy and bitter. In a "Postscript Concerning the Independents Confession of Oct 12 1658" Baxter recorded his "despondencie" and "griefe", as "Peace began to seeme so much more hopelesse than it was before". "How low then", he sadly lamented, "hath this laid our hopes of Reconciliation".³⁷ Yet Baxter

³⁴ Powicke, *Life of Baxter*, p. 274.

³⁵ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 169, "The Left and Its Past", p. 150.

³⁶ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 162-163.

³⁷ DWL MS BT vi. 203r, item #201.

was not one to be passive or compliant; his postscript went on to discuss the sticking points and the possibilities even then of reconciliation,³⁸ and he focused his frustration on the unseen machinations of John Owen, the leading Independent. Baxter's "hopes for an understanding", Lamont points out, "were based on the assumption that Owen had no more claim to represent the Independent point of view than did [John] Humphrey and [Thomas] Blake the Presbyterian". Baxter was mistaken. The 1658 Declaration seemed "the product of the intransigence of Owen and Nye".³⁹ Baxter and Owen had never regarded each other fondly, but unlike his relationship with Cromwell, Baxter's view of Owen only got worse. It would have important implications when the two were unwillingly thrust together as fellow nonconformists after the Restoration.

The Savoy Conference, then, was a disaster for Baxter's irenic aspirations, but worse was to come. A second episode a year later also hampered church unity and helped permanently to damage relations between Baxter and the Independents.⁴⁰ By this time Baxter had transferred his expectations of a godly magistrate from Oliver Cromwell to his son,⁴¹ but in 1659 the rule of Richard Cromwell quickly collapsed. Baxter bitterly blamed Owen for the sinking of the Protectorate along with all his dreams. His suspicions were not unwarranted. In 1657 Richard Cromwell, as Chancellor, had rebuffed Owen by not reappointing him as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University.⁴² Their relationship in 1659 was hardly amicable, then, and even A. G. Matthews, the Congregationalist historian, admits that Owen "was hand in glove with

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vi. 203r-204r.

³⁹ Lamont, *Millennium*, pp. 169, 171.

⁴⁰ Relationships between the Independents and the Presbyterians generally deteriorated in 1658 and 1659, George R. Abernathy, "Richard Baxter and the Cromwellian Church", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 24 (1961), p. 217.

⁴¹ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 183.

⁴² Matthews, *Savoy Declaration*, p. 10.

Republican officers who engineered Richard Cromwell's abdication".⁴³ Baxter later recalled Owen's own admission that he had been "an Agent" in Richard's downfall.⁴⁴ His bitterness at the fact flowed freely in the manuscript of the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* - he condemned Owen's "confidence and busybodiness" and "magisteriall counsell" - but both Matthew Sylvester and Edmund Calamy never allowed it to force its way into print. It was scathing enough for Geoffrey Nuttall to observe that this "bitterness...is unusual even for Baxter, sharp as he often is".⁴⁵ Thus in the years that followed the Restoration John Owen, and the Independent spirit generally,⁴⁶ were the focus of Baxter's bitterness at the failed ecumenical dreams of the 1650s.

So far Owen and his Independent colleagues had offended Baxter. In the third important event it would be Baxter's turn to offend them. After the Restoration a new religious settlement was required, and the necessary negotiations between the Presbyterians and the bishops of the recently restored Church of England moved quickly to a delicate stage. A meeting was held at Worcester House on 22 October 1660 at which Charles II, some newly-restored bishops and the Presbyterian representatives were present. Lord Chancellor Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon, produced a petition from the Independents and Anabaptists requesting toleration in the post-Restoration religious settlement.⁴⁷ The proposal was met with silence, until Baxter - fearing such a concession would let in the Roman Catholics and unable to control

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Richard Baxter, *An Account Of The Reasons Why The Twelve Arguments, Said to be John Owen's, Change not my Judgment about Communion with Parish-Churches*, 1684, p. 27. In *Catholic Communion Defended*.

⁴⁵ G. F. Nuttall, "The MS. of *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696)", *JEH*, 6 (1955), p. 78. Nuttall compares the differences between the published version and the manuscript version of Richard Cromwell's demise and Owen's part in it, pp. 77-79.

⁴⁶ Lamont explains that Baxter perceived a link between "Owen's intrigues" in 1659 and the "intransigent" Savoy Conference a year earlier, *Millennium*, p. 189.

⁴⁷ *Rel. Bax.*, II. 277.

himself despite the whispered warning of Dr John Wallis - "infallibly rose to the High Church bait" by declaring that the request was unacceptable.⁴⁸ His ill-timed fastidiousness lessened the group's favour with Charles; the Presbyterians' hopes of an inclusive settlement were set back considerably; and the Independents were dismayed, appalled and offended at his behaviour.⁴⁹

Their disappointment is understandable, however. Baxter had earned for himself a reputation for catholicity, and that is largely what he is remembered for today; "his 'pacific vision' has earned him just renown".⁵⁰ A. Harold Wood's 1963 work, *Church Unity Without Uniformity*, for example, is testimony to the generosity with which Baxter's ecumenical efforts are remembered. Yet there were very real boundaries to his ideal of a broadly-based church, and Baxter's idea of toleration extended only so far. Catholicity had its limits. It was yet another of the contradictions that infiltrated his efforts, and it demonstrates that he could never escape the seventeenth century quite so easily as his admirers have supposed. It is an area of his career which requires revision thirty years after Wood's all-too-generous appraisal.

The point is, though, that Baxter's relations with Owen and the Independents were damaged even further. Their 1658 intransigence was matched by his own in 1660. All this was just as an exclusive religious settlement and the harsh Clarendon code descended upon them as newly-created nonconformists. The gulf between them only widened. That distance was demonstrated in the late 1660s when a rumour reached Baxter that John Owen was interested in reconciliation between the Independents and

⁴⁸ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 275.

⁴⁹ A. Harold Wood, *Church Unity Without Uniformity. A Study of Seventeenth-Century English Church Movements and of Richard Baxter's Proposals for a Comprehensive Church*, 1963, pp. 148-150; Powicke, *Life of Baxter*, p. 195.

⁵⁰ Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, p. 17.

the Presbyterians. Baxter considered it only his “Duty without any thoughts of former things, to go to him, and be a Seeker of Peace”, but the very first thing he did was to remind Owen of “what he had done formerly”. And if this had not offended Owen, he was certainly annoyed with a further “chiding Letter”, and in the end fifteen months of negotiations came to nothing.⁵¹ Owen’s behaviour was mysterious, but he certainly showed no inclination to work closely with Baxter towards unity. By 1670 there was, then, a longstanding legacy of distrust between Baxter and the Independents.

All this wariness between the two parties might have carried on without them ever coming to blows had it not been for Baxter’s disturbing realisation that the spirit of sinful separation was rapidly spreading. In a letter of May 1670 Baxter lamented the surprising prevalence of the Independents.

In the 3 next great Parishes where I live there is scarce one professour of a multitude (save a few Citizens) that is not turned to the Seekers, and I know not what... . And the silenced Minister of the next great Parish (Hendon) I heare but three or four professours of a multitude that have not all cast off their old pastour (an excellent man) and follow an unlearned ignorant fellow neare me... . And in London where there was one Separatists ten yeares agoe, there is a multitude.⁵²

Even those “peaceable Ministers whose concord was wont to be so much of my delight”, he moaned, had succumbed to the “spirit of Separation”. His concern had first been roused “in the year 1667, observing how mens minds grew every day more and more exasperated by their sufferings”.⁵³ So now he felt the call of “necessity” when he witnessed “those Principles growing up apace, in this time of provocation, which will certainly increase or continue our *divisions*, if *they* continue and increase”.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Rel. Bax.*, III. 61-69.

⁵² Baxter to Richard Sargeant, 14 May [1670]: Houghton Library, Harvard University, Autograph File: photostats in DWL, refs. R.1014 and 61.22 (Morrison, 2nd ser., i. 167); quoted in CCRB #799, II. 86-88.

⁵³ Baxter, *Defence Of The Principles Of Love*, p. 40.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 43.

There might have been some truth to Baxter's suspicions. The ecclesiastical and social isolation of nonconformist life was not always easy to bear. The Clarendon Code was neither enforced uniformly nor all that effective, of course, but its legislation could easily be used against dissenters. And as the harsh demands of nonconformity persisted many of Baxter's Presbyterian colleagues, by the early 1670s at least, were showing "a greater readiness to accept their nonconformist status, [and] to look to the organization and perpetuation of their churches as the Independents and Quakers had done".⁵⁵ It is not surprising that many nonconformists who had previously harboured hopes of inclusion in the Church of England would come to view their separation as an unavoidable and unchangeable reality; but Baxter was not one of them. He was convinced that separation on the Independents' terms was nothing short of sin, and that sin demanded nothing short of outright denunciation, no matter how ill-timed or provocative the necessary offensive might be. Independency was becoming distressingly popular, something had to be done, and Baxter readied himself to do it.

There were three facets of Independency that worried Baxter, and each featured in his strategy to combat it. "English Independents", Lamont explains, "had first to abandon rigid criteria for admitting men to the Lord's Supper, their millenarian fantasies and their strict Calvinist dogma".⁵⁶ In other words, "[i]f only they would shut up about Free Grace, abandon the chimera of a toleration that would bring in Papists and Quakers, and be less pessimistic about the numbers of godly in a parish!"⁵⁷ Thus Baxter's concerns were both ecclesiological and soteriological. Not surprisingly, he had similar objections to John Owen, "two temporary, one permanent". The first two

⁵⁵ N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England*, Athens, 1987, p. 59.

⁵⁶ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 216.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

comprised a residue of bitterness towards Owen for his role in the twin setbacks of 1658 and 1659, the *Declaration of Faith* and the fall of the Protectorate. “Third, there was the doctrinal division between Owen’s emphasis on Free Grace and Baxter’s on Universal Redemption”.⁵⁸ Again, these three could be boiled down to two fundamental objections to Independency: ecclesiology and soteriology. And if Baxter were to make some dent in the Independent’s increasing popularity, he had to assault both.

But, as usual, there was much more to it than just theology. By now Baxter had come to the conclusion that it was not Antinomianism in itself that had produced the civil war, but the “spirit of separation”, of which Antinomianism was merely a subset. So in the early 1670s Baxter tried to undermine Independency not just by attacking its ecclesiology and soteriology, but also by advertising its culpability as the real culprit behind all the trauma and enmity of the English Civil War. The fascinating thing about a 1669 letter to John Owen, for example, is its language. It resonates with Baxter’s lamentation to John Warren of the sad effects of Antinomianism almost twenty years earlier. He that can

consider what the effects of our Divisions have been upon Church and State, and the lives of Some, and the Souls of Thousands, both of the openly ungodly, and Professors, and that knows how great a reproach they are now to our Profession, and hardening of the Wicked, and hindrance to that good, even of the best, and yet doth not thirst to see them healed, hath small sense of the interest of Christ, and Souls.⁵⁹

Baxter’s complaint about divisions, and his appeals to a leading Independent, make a connection that was not apparent earlier. The same sense of urgency permeated a 1670 letter to John Woodbridge, pastor at Killingworth, in which Baxter again blamed the Independents for England’s woes.

The same cause hath brought us into all the Confusions and distresses and heart-warres which we are in here in these Kingdomes: And though no nation under heaven, can be more unexcusable in the guilt of *Love-killing principles and divisions*; if experience may be taken for

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

⁵⁹ Baxter to John Owen, 16 February 1668[9]: *Rel. Bax.*, III. 68 (CCRB #771).

a convincing meanes: Yet is our sin a defensitive to it selfe, and feedeth upon its bitterest fruits and issue... . It is the houre of our Temptation to all extreames.⁶⁰

Here again, Baxter's talk of "fruits and issue" is a linguistic link to his lament of the early 1650s, but the object of that lament had changed.

And so, in 1670 Baxter launched a public assault on his fellow sufferers, and the longstanding tension between them exploded into anger and hostility. Baxter's attack focused on the ecclesiology, the soteriology and the past history of Independency, and it all began in his *Cure of Church-divisions*. Its title could not have been more ironic, since the book produced "a storm of Obloquy among almost all the separating Party of Professors".⁶¹ In it Baxter claimed to be writing against schism, separation, division, censure and hatred in general, but in the context of 1670 it looked for all the world like an attack on the Independents, and this from a fellow nonconformist who, on the face of it, had joined them in their Independency.⁶² He even offered tacit approval for the Restoration and its religious settlement.⁶³

The book did two things. It attacked the "separating spirit" of the Independents, who withdrew so uncharitably from communion with the Church of England, and it also revealed the part played by that spirit in England's civil war. "I have seen what Love-killing principles have done", Baxter warned ominously at the beginning of his book.

I have seen this grow to the height of *Ranters* in horrid Blasphemies, and then of *Quakers*, in disdainful pride and surliness: and into the way of *Seekers*, that were to seek for a Ministry, a Church, a Scripture, and consequently a Christ... . When *Love* was first killed in their own breasts, by these same principles, which I here detect, I have seen how confidently the killing of the King, the Rebellious demolishing of the Government of the Land, the killing of many Thousands of their Brethren, the turnings and overturnings of all kinds of Rule, even that which they themselves set up, have been committed, and justified, and prophanely fathered upon God. These with much more fruits of Love-killing principles, and divisions I have seen.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Baxter to John Woodbridge, 3 February 1669[/70]: DWL MS BC ii. 237r (CCRB #791).

⁶¹ *Rel. Bax.*, III. 70.

⁶² John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850*, 1975, p. 395.

⁶³ Richard Baxter, *The Cure Of Church-divisions: Or, Directions for weak Christians, to keep them from being Dividers, or Troublers of the Church*, 1670, preface.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Baxter publicly ascribed to the Independents the fault for England's past woes, from its radical religion to its regicide.

Baxter claimed that he was "not kindling fires, nor drawing Swords against you [the Independents], nor stirring up any to do you hurt, but only perswading all dissenters to love one another".⁶⁵ It would have had a hollow ring to his audience, for whom this was indeed a bitter pill to swallow.⁶⁶ Baxter was more realistic when he expected a fair measure of outrage,⁶⁷ and he was not disappointed. It was spread abroad, Baxter exclaimed, that "I accused them of Schism, and then that I wrote for Conformity, and lastly, that I conformed".⁶⁸ Such was the "Back-biting and Slandering among the Separating Party", he recalled with dismay, that "the Streets rang with Reproaches against me".⁶⁹ Even worse, "my own old Flock at *Kiderminster* began (some of them) to Censure me";⁷⁰ a bitter response indeed!

At a time when all nonconformists were experiencing persecution it seemed foolish and obstinate for Baxter to set his targets on his fellow sufferers, despite the fact that Presbyterian and Independent Dissenters were "at one another's throats" anyway.⁷¹ A wounded letter from Henry Oasland, a long-time friend of Baxter and a neighbouring

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ In addition to his *Cure*, Baxter's defence of the book a year later (his *Principles of Love*) continued to cause offence. So also did his introductory epistle to John Bryan's, *Dwelling With God, The Interest and Duty Of Believers*, 1670.

⁶⁷ Baxter, *Cure of Church-divisions*, preface.

⁶⁸ *Rel. Bax.*, III. 70. That particular rumour was remarkably robust and persistent, making its way to Scotland, Ireland and New England in 1670-1671. Baxter was informed of it by John Rawlet in late June or early July of 1670, DWL MS BC i. 68v (CCRB #801). Rawlet was followed by John Wilson on 14 July, DWL MS BC vi. 22r (CCRB #806). Lauderdale even offered Baxter a Scottish bishopric on the strength of the rumour, *Rel. Bax.*, III. 75 (CCRB #802). And by 31 March 1671 John Woodbridge of New England had encountered the rumour, and upon investigation had not heard it contradicted, DWL MS BC ii. 234r (CCRB #834). Around Autumn that year Baxter had to put him straight, blaming his *Cure of Church-divisions* and the "slander" of the Independents for the misunderstanding, DWL MS BC ii. 241r (CCRB #855).

⁶⁹ *Rel. Bax.*, III. 70.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, III. 73.

⁷¹ Spurr, "From Puritanism to Dissent", p. 256.

minister during the 1650s, reflects the widespread disappointment at his behaviour. It was “blameworthy”, Oasland complained, “that you would declare against separation at a time when your godly Brethren (if not yourselfe) lay under [the] odious crime of separation and not add one worde or [two] in our behalfe”.⁷² A measured letter from John Wilson, an ejected minister, two months later also communicated the thoughts of many. “Good sir”, he wrote, “while you plead so much for love and concord towards others, do not neglect it towards your fellow sufferers, who come far nearer to you in principles, affections and practise than they [the conformists] do”.⁷³ Building on earlier friction, then, the *Cure* threatened to kill to patient, and it set up the 1670s as a decade of distrust and anger between Baxter and the Independents.

As destructive as it was to Baxter’s relationship with the Independents, his *Cure* was not the whole of his attack in 1670; the soteriological flank still had to be dealt with. Ever since he had received the cold shoulder from John Owen, soteriology had been on his mind. “Having long (upon the Suspension of my Aphorisms) been purposing to draw up a Method of Theology, I now began it”.⁷⁴ This project continued to occupy Baxter throughout the early 1670s, and would finally result in his *Methodus Theologiae Christianae* (1681).⁷⁵ Soteriology had taken a back seat throughout the 1660s, but by the end of the decade it was becoming an increasingly important focus of Baxter’s attentions.

This is where the *Life of Faith* fits in; it was the companion volume to Baxter’s *Cure of Church-divisions*. Indeed, the *Life of Faith* makes very interesting reading in

⁷² Henry Oasland to Baxter, [c.May 1670]: DWL MS BC iii. 297r (CCRB #798).

⁷³ John Wilson to Baxter, 14 July 1670: DWL MS BC vi. 23r (CCRB #806).

⁷⁴ *Rel. Bax.*, III. 69.

⁷⁵ Baxter to Lauderdale, 24 June 1670: *Rel. Bax.*, III. 75 (CCRB #802); Baxter to Alexander Pitcairne [senior], 12 July 1673: DWL MS BC i. 185r-v (CCRB #911); Baxter to Thomas Hotchkis, 4 September 1673: DWL MS BC iii. 129r (CCRB #922).

this light. It is true that it railed against “the antinomian devil”, “unskilful mountebanks”, “blind libertines”, and “unskilful guides”.⁷⁶ Yet functioning in exactly the same way were condemnations of “mountebanks and sectaries”, “the common separating spirit of the sectaries”, and “those that are inclinable to sinful separation”⁷⁷ For years Baxter had linked Independency with Antinomianism;⁷⁸ in the *Life of Faith* that forced marriage was consummated (at gunpoint). “Some ignorant sectaries cry down all preaching, as mere morality, which doth not frequently toss the name of Christ, and free grace”.⁷⁹

The *Life of Faith*, then, was a veiled attack on the Independents. Its target is unmistakable, even if it did not provoke the same degree of outrage as his *Cure*, and even though Baxter’s historians have not perceived its true intent, since he himself never made it explicit. The recrudescence of his outrage against Antinomianism in that book, therefore, is not so mysterious or surprising after all. Shocked by the surprising growth of Independency, Baxter used the *Life of Faith* to attack its supposed Antinomian inclinations. It was that growth in Independency that made the difference between the 1660s when Baxter did not attack Antinomianism, and the 1670s when he did. And this makes sense of not just the *Life of Faith*, but of most of his attacks on Antinomianism that quickly followed.

There can be no doubt that the bitterness between these uncomfortable bedfellows carried on into the decade. It is revealed in a consistent subtext of dislike and dispute which ran throughout Baxter’s 1670s publications. In many ways it was Baxter’s disputational lifestyle of the civil war all over again, with its daily contention

⁷⁶ *Life of Faith: Works*, III. 671, 728, 733.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 732, 713, 735.

⁷⁸ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 111.

⁷⁹ *Life of Faith: Works*, III. 686.

and frequent soteriological debate. In 1671, for example, Baxter bitterly condemned a host of “angry contentious Adversaries”,⁸⁰ together with many “ignorant, self-conceited contentious teachers” and their “furious censures and revilings, and...slanders”.⁸¹ A year later he complained of his ever-present opponents, and their “doleful mischief” and “blind zeal”. “[T]hree or four of them”, he continued,

have made it their practice to back-bite my self and tell People, *He holdeth dangerous opinions; He is erroneous in the point of Justification. And his Books are unsound and have dangerous Doctrines; He leaveth the old way of Justification, he favoureth Socinianism, and such-like.*⁸²

And in 1675, in Baxter’s *Catholick Theologie*, a fictional sectary had this to say to him: “Sir, the City ringeth of you as one that greatly wrongeth the cause of God...I am not alone in judging thus of you; *City and Country* ring of it: what company can one come into where you are not talkt of? I daily hear good people lament you”.⁸³ Of course, these were Baxter’s words in the mouth of his opponent, but widespread hostility from the Independents is by no means implausible.

The whole controversy was having its effect on Baxter, who by 1673 was being accused by the Independents of preaching Arminianism.⁸⁴ Of course, this was largely just another rhetorical tool used to discredit an opponent, such as Baxter’s use of the Antinomian label itself, but it is clear that he had returned to an earlier Arminian-like emphasis. He was preaching that “Man’s Will had a natural Liberty, though a Moral Thralldom to Vice, and that Men might have Christ and Life, if they were truly willing, though Grace must make them Willing; and that *Men* have power to do better than they do”.⁸⁵ The *Life of Faith* also demonstrates considerable distance from the Calvinist

⁸⁰ Richard Baxter, *The Duty Of Heavenly Meditation, Reviewed by Richard Baxter, At the Invitation of Mr. Giles Firmin’s Exceptions In his Book Entitled The Real Christian*, 1671, p. 3.

⁸¹ Baxter, *How Far Holinesse Is The Design Of Christianity*, p. 17.

⁸² Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness*, preface.

⁸³ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, II. 283.

⁸⁴ *Rel. Bax.*, III. 103.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

emphasis in Baxter's 1657 *Treatise of Conversion*. "Many mistake the meaning of Christ's covenant", he warned, "and think that it hath no universality in it; and that he died only for the elect".⁸⁶ Furthermore, it was possible for any soul to believe in Christ, and this syllogism effectively attributed the cause of salvation not to election, but to an individual's belief: "He that truly believeth is justified, and adopted, and an heir of life. But I do truly believe: therefore I am justified, adopted, and an heir of life".⁸⁷ The emphasis on a person's own belief was Arminian.

It might be argued that with only a minor amount of manipulation Baxter's assertions in the *Life of Faith* were consistent with his earlier Calvinism, and that they were not out of place in his system which mediated between the two positions. But, as always, the crucial factor is the change in emphasis from one side of the spectrum to the other. Once again Baxter had abandoned for the moment a Calvinist emphasis, and had adopted an Arminian accent. And once more he had done so in the presence of Antinomianism, and to an audience typified by the man "who can only toss in his mouth the name of FREE GRACE".⁸⁸ Yet again, Antinomianism had driven Baxter away from Calvinism towards Arminianism; the 1670s nonconformists were another audience he could not trust.

Once begun, this polemical war was difficult to halt, and Baxter was hardly one to practise restraint. Accusation led to counter-accusation in an almost endless cycle. In 1674 Baxter preached a sermon condemning Antinomian corruptions of the gospel. The Independents in turn accused him of preaching justification by works. In his *Appeal to*

⁸⁶ *Life of Faith: Works*, III. 656.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 677, 729.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, III. 656.

the Light he responded impenitently by reaffirming his dislike of Antinomian doctrine.⁸⁹

A year later he published his *Catholick Theologie*, in which Antinomianism received repeated rebukes.⁹⁰ Thus Antinomianism continued to play a substantial part in his war with the Independents.

But as well as making war on the Antinomian inclinations of the Independents, Baxter also took part in a more general debate on soteriological issues. His fight with the Independents may have made him more sensitive to the issue, or he may simply have welcomed yet another chance to engage in soteriological controversy for its own sake. In 1671, for example, Baxter contributed to the debate surrounding Edward Fowler's, *The Design of Christianity*, which had been published earlier in the year.⁹¹ Fowler was a rising churchman - he went on to become Bishop of Gloucester - who promoted the Latitudinarian's preference for moralism. His controversial book declared "the establishment of Real Righteousness and True Holiness in the world to be the *Ultimate Design of our Saviour's Coming, and the Grand and even whole Business of the Christian Institution*".⁹² Fowler included an attack on the Antinomians - "God knows there are too many such in our days" - but they were not his central concern.⁹³

In response, the prominent Baptist John Bunyan bitterly denounced Fowler's book. He accused Fowler of restoring people to their own imperfect, natural holiness of the moral law, rather than directing them to a new righteousness through faith in

⁸⁹ Events are clear in Baxter's *Appeal*, but see Samuel Crisp, *Compleat Works*, To the Reader, for his recollection of the event.

⁹⁰ For example, see *Catholick Theologie*, I. ii. 22-24, 35, 42, 44, 59, 66-67, 75; I. iii. 288-289 and especially II. 219-262.

⁹¹ For a discussion of this controversy see Rivers, "Grace, Holiness, and the Pursuit of Happiness", pp. 55-62.

⁹² Edward Fowler, *The Design Of Christianity; ... That the enduing men with... True Holiness, was the Ultimate End of our Saviour's Coming into the World*, 1671, To the Reader.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-221.

Christ.⁹⁴ He asserted that Christ “took our Nature, and Sin, and Curse, and Death upon him”; that the elect were “*even now* compleat in the Righteousness of him, and stand discharged of guilt, even by the Faith of him”; and that faith was “onely a beholder of things, but not a Justifier of Persons”.⁹⁵ Fowler had argued a case for moralism, Bunyan had responded with a prescription close to Antinomianism, and there could be little doubt with whom Baxter would agree when he was quickly and inevitably drawn into the debate.

Baxter defended Fowler in the controversy that the *Design of Christianity* had provoked, although he conceded that “our *Personal Holiness* is not the *only end* (or design) of God in mans redemption, nor in instituting the Christian Religion”.⁹⁶ The main thrust of Baxter’s contribution, probably with Bunyan in mind, was to condemn the Antinomians for a much more dangerous error. “I will not here stay to deal with those Points”, he advised, but the temptation was irresistible as he exposed the apparent absurdities of Antinomian doctrine.⁹⁷ He berated the “ignorant, self-conceited contentious teachers” with their slander and censure (probably the Independents again), and he lamented the damage that Antinomianism had done to a true understanding of free grace.⁹⁸ Thus a minor point in Fowler’s disquisition dominated Baxter’s brief defence. Antinomianism, for Baxter, was the real culprit behind an unfortunate and largely unnecessary debate.

⁹⁴ John Bunyan, *A Defence Of The Doctrine of Justification By Faith In Jesus Christ Shewing True Gospel Holiness flows from Thence*, 1672, pp. 12, 14, 84-85, 110. For discussion of Bunyan’s soteriology, see Rivers, “Grace, Holiness and the Pursuit of Happiness”, pp. 48-49, 61-69; Gordon Campbell, “Fishing in Other Men’s Waters: Bunyan and the Theologians”, in N. H. Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus. Tercentenary Essays*, Oxford, 1988, pp. 147-151.

⁹⁵ Bunyan, *A Defence Of The Doctrine of Justification*, p. 82.

⁹⁶ Baxter, *How Far Holinesse Is The Design Of Christianity*, p. 12.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

As Fowler's book suggested, a wider debate was going on, and Baxter was by no means alone in his fight against Antinomianism. Another fellow-soldier was Jeremiah Ives, whose 1671 *Impartial Account Of Two Several Disputations* contained an appendix in which Antinomian doctrine was condemned. Baxter would have found a welcome friend in Ives, who quoted him extensively to disprove the certain perseverance of believers.⁹⁹ More than that, though, Ives considered Antinomianism in exactly the same terms, and condemned the same host of villains such as Tobias Crisp, John Owen, William Eyre, Edward Bagshaw, John Crandon and the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*.¹⁰⁰ And like Baxter he drew the false conclusion that Antinomian doctrine, such as he described, facilitated a life of sin and licence. Antinomians, Ives concluded, "may be as bold as they please with [Christ], and sin at what rate, and to what degree their lusts shall at any time propence them; this is but the sense, sum, and substance of the forecited doctrines".¹⁰¹

It was, of course, a commonplace in any Antinomian debate such as this for the attacking side to claim that Antinomianism was synonymous with lustful licence. John Bunyan provided his own answer to the charge, one which resonated with that offered by Tobias Crisp in the 1640s.

These Sir are the Motives by which we Christians act; because we are *forgiven*, because we are *Sons*, and if *Sons*, then *Heirs*, and so we act... . We know that this Doctrine killeth Sin, and curseth it, at the very roots... . Yea, we have a double Motive to be Holy, and Humble before him...Yet this Worketh in us no looseness, nor favour to Sin, but so much the more an abhorrence of it.¹⁰²

It was a familiar and reasoned answer to anyone who would treat it fairly, but few did. It all serves to demonstrate the inability and unwillingness of opposing parties to listen

⁹⁹ Jeremiah Ives, *Vindiciae Veritatis, Or, An Impartial Account Of Two several Disputations*, 1672, pp. 172-190.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-102.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196. See also p. 200.

¹⁰² Bunyan, *A Defence Of The Doctrine Of Justification*, pp. 10, 82-83.

to each other, the charged atmosphere of debate in which extreme positions are asserted of the other with unshakeable but immodest certainty, and the constant need to wheel in the same old defence to the same old accusations. In terms of the debate itself, there was little difference between the 1640s and the 1670s.

In 1671 Baxter responded to the Baptist, John Bunyan, and five years later he opposed an Anglican, Thomas Tully, who questioned Baxter's continued emphasis on Antinomianism. Tully had already criticised George Bull, whose "timely antidote" against "solifidianism, or rather libertinism" had disparaged the notion of justification by faith alone.¹⁰³ In 1675 he responded to Baxter's *Appeal to the Light* by casting doubt on the Antinomian threat. First, he questioned their numbers. "[W]here have they of late apper'd?", he queried, and "with what strength and *numbers* to require so brisk an alarme, as if they were still at our Gates, and ready to climbe our *walls*?"¹⁰⁴ It is significant that Tully, who was not a nonconformist, should discount the number of Antinomians in England; he had no cause to defend the Independents. Second, Tully challenged Baxter's definition of an Antinomian. He charged him with attributing to the "Antinomians" some "vile" consequences of his own devising.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore,

[Baxter's] *Libertines, Antinomians, &c.* are whoever assert against Him the Justification of a Sinner by *Faith, without Works*, such as the Church of *England* with the rest of the Reformed Churches. These must be driven by Him with the Herd of *Libertines* as Beasts to the Slaughter.¹⁰⁶

It was a familiar line of argument and it was brief, but it was also telling. In denying the threat of Antinomianism, by questioning Baxter's assessment of its numbers and challenging his description of it, Tully undermined Baxter's offensive against it in the

¹⁰³ Spurr, *Restoration Church*, pp. 312-313.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Tully, *Animadversions upon a sheet of Mr Baxters Entitled An Appeal to the Light*, Oxford, 1675, sig. G2r.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, sig. G2v.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. G3v.

1670s. Baxter was hardly going to take that lying down, and he responded to Tully in a number of publications, including *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness*.¹⁰⁷ The content of these ongoing debates was predictable enough,¹⁰⁸ and Antinomianism was a regular feature.

It is important to note that Thomas Tully was not an Independent, because by 1676 they had ceased to be the main focus of Baxter's public campaign against Antinomianism. Despite his fierce criticism throughout the early 1670s, they were no longer the enemy. This is William Lamont's conclusion, although he approaches the change from a different perspective. "I think we can distinguish three distinct phases in Baxter's views on 'National Churches' after the Restoration", he explains. The first phase was between 1660 and 1676, when Baxter, despite himself being a nonconformist, remained loyal to the vision of a national church allied to a godly magistrate. It was in part this loyalty that produced such strain between Baxter and the Independents. The second phase, between 1676 and 1684, was one in which Baxter lost faith in the National Church model, "and moved his fellow Nonconformists in a sectarian direction",¹⁰⁹ a trend that was under way in any case. "At the time of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, deference to a 'National Church' and to the supreme magistrate no longer seemed the highest wisdom".¹¹⁰ In 1684, however, Baxter's confidence in the National Church model was restored, and he remained its committed defender until his death in 1691.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Baxter responded to Tully in the third part of his *More Proofs of Infants Church-membership* (1675); in his *Catholick Theologie* (1675); indirectly, in his *Two Disputations of Original Sin* (1675); and finally in his *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness* (1676).

¹⁰⁸ For a description of that content, see Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 60-61.

¹⁰⁹ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 212.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

The development that began in 1676 - influenced by prevailing nonconformist trends (towards an Independent church model) and reinforced by national pressures (the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis) - was a staggering change for Baxter. So distressed was he by the growth in Independency in the late 1660s that he was prepared to risk opprobrium by publishing his *Cure of Church-divisions*. Yet six years on he was himself helping to swell the ranks of those with Independent sympathies. Not only that, in the years from 1676 to 1690 he did not publish one new piece against the Antinomianism of the Independents.¹¹² This is not to say that he refrained from attacking other figures such as Thomas Tully, nor that he ceased privately to write on the subject,¹¹³ but in public Baxter had called a truce in his war on the Independents. He was himself becoming enamoured with their ecclesiology, and as a by-product of that new-found admiration he also ceased to expose their Antinomian inclinations. This is not to say that he thought any more warmly of the Independent's liking for Antinomian doctrine, just that he no longer aired his dissatisfaction in public.

This is clarified by another conflict in 1677 when Dr John Troughton, a blind teacher and author whom Baxter had known as a child,¹¹⁴ vindicated his understanding of the Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone, and attacked that of his opponents. Baxter was only one of three authors to be named, but he was the major figure.¹¹⁵ It was in no small measure the usual rhetoric of debate, contending that Baxter's doctrine of

¹¹² The exception was his *Imputative Righteousness Truly Stated...Manifesting in what Sense sound Protestants hold it: And in what Sense Libertines pervert it* (1679), but this was simply a reprint of his *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness*, so it was hardly new. Interestingly, Baxter alluded to a brief outburst of antagonism from the Independents, beginning around 1678, which might have prompted the book's reappearance (*Dying Thoughts: Works*, III. 1002).

¹¹³ He actually wrote two more pieces in private, which (to varying degrees) attacked Antinomianism: *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, which was finally published in 1690; and *End of Doctrinal Controversy*, which produced no such result when it appeared in 1691, and was rather muted in its anti-Antinomianism.

¹¹⁴ Baxter, *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, preface.

¹¹⁵ The other two were Thomas Hotchkis and Joseph Truman. John Troughton, *Lutherus Redivivus: Or The Protestant Doctrine of Justification by Faith Onely Vindicated*, 1677, pp. 4, 6, 8.

justification was a covenant of works which led inevitably to Arminianism, Roman Catholicism and Socinianism.¹¹⁶ Yet it made some extremely astute observations. Troughton had no truck with the Antinomians' "high flown pretences...to faith without works subsequent"; they were, he wrote dismissively, "the irrational transport of an opinion".¹¹⁷ But he argued that the Antinomians had been a distraction in soteriological debate, both in the 1640s and more recently in the 1670s. The effect had been to encourage the growth of Arminianism, which provided "the best means to oppose" them.¹¹⁸ In other words, the Antinomians had inadvertently sidetracked and corrupted the soteriological debate.

Being "long since silenced", Troughton continued, the Antinomians were now irrelevant, yet writers such as Baxter persisted in dredging up their memory unfairly to malign and misrepresent their opponents.¹¹⁹ Indeed, Troughton accused Baxter of seeking to shame solifidian doctrine, to create a peace on his terms alone, to quarrel endlessly over words, and to argue that the "Doctrine of Imputation is ridiculous...absurd, irrational, Unscriptural, yea, Non-sense".¹²⁰ And the Antinomians, although misguided, were treated unfairly by Baxter, being picked on for the "well-ment, but not well exprest sayings of popular Preachers and Writers".¹²¹ As a result it was difficult to be sure, Troughton maintained, whether Baxter and others set out to "oppose the common Protestant Doctrine or these errors onely".¹²² Others had already arrived at that conclusion, but few had taken such an astute and well-reasoned approach. Ultimately,

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 30, 51, 72, 89.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, preface, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, preface.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

Troughton was suggesting that Baxter had been distracted by the Antinomians and diverted towards Arminianism. He was not far from the mark.

It may well have been Troughton to whom he referred when in 1679 Baxter warned of some “very dangerous Writings of Late”,¹²³ and in response he was extremely aggressive. This was made all the more unfortunate by the fact that when Baxter finally published the piece Troughton had been dead for almost a decade.¹²⁴ He accused Troughton of holding “Libertine false Doctrines”, of possessing an “*unhumbled understanding*, which doth not sufficiently suspect it self”, and, being blind, of never having read the books to which he appealed.¹²⁵ Until then, Baxter had restrained himself from responding publicly for four reasons: he knew Troughton was “a very honest man”; he was an old acquaintance of Baxter’s family; “judicious Readers have no need of an Antidote against so weak a Poison”; and, most significantly, Troughton was “a sufferer for Nonconformity with the rest”.¹²⁶ This is the point. Baxter’s new-found loyalty to his fellow nonconformists restrained him from attacking their Antinomianism in public, even if it continued to grate on him in private. Such uncharacteristic equanimity is revealing.

When his response finally appeared, however, Baxter failed to counter Troughton’s incisive allegations. He simply continued his attack on Antinomianism, which he said corrupted the gospel, subverted Christianity, and promoted infidelity and profaneness.¹²⁷ He listed twenty absurd implications of strict imputation, and concluded

¹²³ [John Humfrey?], *The Middle Way of Predetermination Asserted*, 1679, [Baxter’s] epistle to the reader.

¹²⁴ Troughton died on 20 August, 1681 (*DNB*, XIX.1187) and Baxter published his response in 1690. Troughton’s son, also named John, wrote an outraged letter in defence of his father. See above, p. 97.

¹²⁵ Baxter, *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, preface.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, prologue, pp. 10, 13, 20, 23, 115.

that Antinomianism was simply “a perverse corrupting of Christianity, and not to be heard without detestation”.¹²⁸ If the Antinomians were a diversion, Baxter was more than happy to be diverted.

The 1670s, then, had been one of Baxter’s more controversial decades. It certainly began heatedly, and there were hints of acrimony even at its end. It is undeniable that these years witnessed the reappearance of Baxter’s public concern with Antinomianism, and it is tempting to think that this was simply the repetition of his earlier unease. But the nature of this recrudescence is not so simple. While there were unmistakable similarities between this outbreak of anti-Antinomianism and that of the 1640s, there were also significant differences that cannot be explained away by repetition. The whole episode requires careful evaluation.

The Independents were an important target throughout these years, even if they were not always the exclusive focus. Baxter objected to their ecclesiology, but ecclesiology and soteriology could not easily be divided from one another. So, having perceived that the spirit of separation was gaining ground - the trigger for his anti-Antinomian outbursts - and having independently begun renewed soteriological study, he launched a double-barrelled attack in 1670. He daringly decried their separating spirit (and its past effects) in his *Cure of Church-divisions*, and he assaulted their Antinomian inclinations in his *Life of Faith*. Once begun, the debate was difficult to rein in, and his opposition to Antinomianism generally appeared only in books that were intended for a specifically Independent audience. This is not so dissimilar from the 1640s; Baxter simply made the link between Antinomianism and Independency more explicit.

¹²⁸

Ibid., pp. 40, 110-111.

On a deeper level there were further similarities with the 1640s. For a start, hidden away at the back of all this drama was Baxter's decision to revise the *Aphorismes*, that book serving once more as the harbinger of soteriological dispute. There was also a similar pattern in the development of Baxter's concern. After a fierce beginning in his *Life of Faith*, he used every opportunity - in the pulpit or in print - to rebuke the Independents for their Antinomianism. Yet by 1676 (if not earlier) he suspected that it was on the decline, and he could once again be generous. "The Antinomians of late years" he explained then, "have attempted to perswade men, that *secret Election justifieth from Eternity*...But few believe them, the Errour being sufficiently laid open".¹²⁹ He had reached exactly the same point twenty years earlier. And this pattern of rise and fall in his concern seems also to have had its effect on his soteriological presentation. Once more he was inclined to shift his theological emphases away from Calvinism towards Arminianism. In the early 1670s he was once again confronted by an audience he could not trust.

It is possible, then, to conclude from all of these similarities that the 1670s recrudescence of Baxter's anti-Antinomianism was a repetition of his earlier phase of concern, but in fact the two were qualitatively different phenomena. To begin with, the analysis of Davis and Erikson, so useful for the 1640s and 1650s, runs out of relevance in the 1670s. England had not experienced any recent "realignment of power"; there was increasing national tension, but any of England's folk devils were likely to be Roman Catholics, not Antinomians. Life for Baxter had also settled down into some sort of stable routine. Admittedly he was now a reluctant nonconformist, but for a brief while opportunities of public service opened up after Charles II's 1672 Declaration of

¹²⁹ Richard Baxter, *Rich. Baxter's Review Of The State Of Christian Infants. Whether they should be entered in Covenant With God by Baptism*, 1657, pp. 15-16.

Indulgence. He was also happily married, and finally able to send some manuscripts to the press. So he was hardly in need of the Antinomians to give a face to his fears. Indeed, his public aggression against Antinomianism was serving another purpose altogether, a polemical purpose.

In 1670 Baxter was casting around for any sort of stick with which he could beat the Independents. His reinterpretation of the civil war can be seen in this light. No doubt he felt there was some truth to his allegations, but he was equally sure that a Grotian conspiracy lay behind the same event, an effort to bring in Roman Catholicism along French conciliar lines. Baxter was trying to have it both ways when he confronted the Independents with the past as he saw it, but it served a useful polemical function. His accusations of Antinomianism could serve exactly the same purpose. There is no doubt that he would have been concerned by the doctrine's reappearance, but his response was more calculated and less emotive than it was in earlier years. In the 1670s there were no primary disputations to match those of the 1650s. Instead, Baxter's 1670s polemic reflects the distance inherent in his secondary disputations, which were the result not so much of inner compulsion based on the profoundly felt need of the moment, but on the desire simply to win a debate. So Baxter's allegation of Antinomianism was a rhetorical device that could be employed against a wide range of targets, from John Bunyan to Thomas Tully, whose soteriological positions were not necessarily similar. It was a weapon designed primarily to slur an opponent, rather than to provide an accurate assessment of his theology.

Baxter's correspondence provides indisputable evidence that his concern over Antinomianism was a surface affair. In the late 1640s and early 1650s it was impossible to avoid repeated references to Antinomianism in his letters and papers, but in the 1670s

his correspondence bears absolutely no evidence of any Antinomian concern. There was stunning silence on the issue. Thus Baxter was not responding to any inner compulsion when he launched his 1670 assault on Antinomianism. The Antinomians were no longer functioning as a manifestation of Baxter's private fears. Davis and Erikson cannot help to explain this recrudescence, which was a much more controlled, distanced and polemical affair. In the early 1650s Antinomianism served to resecure moral boundaries; in the 1670s it functioned as a rhetorical device with which Baxter might more effectively discredit his increasingly popular opponents. The final proof is found in 1690, when Baxter claimed that Antinomianism had been extinct for thirty-four years.¹³⁰ He referred to what he had written twenty years earlier, but the omission of the 1670s from his immediate recollection serves as a reminder that, in terms of inner compulsion and intensity, it was almost as if that recrudescence had never occurred at all.

It remains that there were two periods in which Baxter was silent on the issue of Antinomianism. Clearly, he was not compelled in these years to resurrect his crusade against it, and the reasons are not hard to find. In both periods the threat came from the opposite side of the soteriological spectrum. In the 1660s Baxter was faced with the disappointment of an uncharitable church settlement which enshrined a style of doctrine that was more Arminian and moralistic; no threat from Antinomianism there. His silence may well have continued except that by 1670 (under the steady pressure of persecution) his nonconformist colleagues were drifting increasingly into Independent - and therefore Antinomian - territory. And Antinomian doctrine was being debated

¹³⁰

Baxter, *Scripture Gospel defended*, title page. See also *Defence of Christ*, To the Reader.

again, providing sufficient provocation for Baxter to rehearse his earlier polemics. He responded out of habit.

The period from the Exclusion Crisis to the Glorious Revolution was also one of silence, initially because of Baxter's temporary truce with the Independents, and, later, because the threat in these years was Roman Catholic. As with the later 1650s, these were more than enough to distract Baxter from any threat of Antinomian doctrine. He was a man who only ever responded to immediate necessity; during the 1660s and 1680s Antinomianism did not provide it. Only in the intervening decades did Baxter's anti-Antinomianism reach any great heights, and only in the early 1690s did his concern begin to match that of five decades earlier.

The 1690s

Richard Baxter died on 8 December, 1691, at about four in the morning. Throughout a long life of protracted illness he had battled death with typical belligerence, but there was no defeating this opponent. Baxter may have died in bed, but he collapsed in the pulpit, striving till the end. More to the point here, he also died in the middle of an Antinomian resurgence, at the height of his recently aroused concern, still energetically contributing to a soteriological battle that others would carry on. Just two months before he died he had completed his last treatise, "A Poor Husbandman's Advocate", in which he paused near the end to vilify a new "Libertine Generation", to lament a renewed Antinomian threat to practical Christianity, and sharply to condemn a revival of "*Crispian, Antichristian libertinism*".¹³¹ His outburst came out of nowhere; it was

¹³¹ DWL MS BT iii. 70v, item #63 (a).

brief, isolated and unexpected in a treatise that dealt with economic issues and greedy landlords. There could be little doubting it, and (following on from a decade of silence on the issue) a handful of publications in a brief two years proved it.¹³² Baxter died having experienced a third phase of intense concern over Antinomianism. The whole affair was both brief and revealing. Unlike the 1670s, this final recrudescence of Baxter's anti-Antinomianism was similar in nature to the first. In December 1691 Baxter may have been finally able to lay his fears to rest, but they were fears as real and powerful as they had ever been.

In 1690 Tobias Crisp rose up to haunt Baxter, bringing his Antinomianism with him.¹³³ To Baxter's horror and astonishment the complete works of Crisp were republished by his son, Samuel, together with ten previously unpublished sermons. Given that Baxter had spent most of his life trying to stamp out Crisp's influence, the mere reappearance of his works was an unthinkable and unexpected disaster. Worse still, attached to the front of the collection was a certificate, signed by twelve nonconformist ministers, testifying that those additional sermons were authentic.¹³⁴ The statement was very limited in its scope, and it was never an endorsement of Crisp's theology, but Baxter was outraged that these men offered even this support to his ancient enemy.¹³⁵ And, adding insult to injury, Baxter himself was attacked in Samuel Crisp's address to the reader. He described Baxter as "the Captain of those that oppose such Doctrines, as are in the following Sermons"; he quoted at length from Baxter's Pinners' Hall sermons of 1672 and 1674, offering his own commentary on Baxter's

¹³² Baxter released three works for publication: *A Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification* (1690); *A Defence of Christ, And Free Grace* (1690) (these two works comprised his *Scripture Gospel defended*); and *An End of Doctrinal Controversies* (1691).

¹³³ For a general summary of the controversy that followed see Thomas, "Break-Up of Nonconformity", pp. 40-42.

¹³⁴ Crisp, *Compleat Works*, To the Reader.

¹³⁵ Baxter, *Defence of Christ, And Free Grace*, To the Reader.

supposed errors; and he defended Tobias Crisp and his doctrines from the charge of licentiousness.¹³⁶

Baxter's response was aggressive and, if nothing else, predictable. His long-time friend, Francis Tallents, wrote immediately (in February 1690) to plead with Baxter not to be heavy-handed in his inevitable response to Crisp. While Tallents was "troubled" at Crisp's reappearance, he questioned whether Baxter should write anything against him. For a start, Baxter had already written more than enough on the subject. Moreover, Crisp may have been misguided, but he never sought "to oppose God and holiness, or subvert Christianity". Finally, he and Baxter had over recent years "with grief" tolerated Latitudinarian error on the other extreme ("exalting Reason and Goodness") and it was only fair they show equal tolerance to Tobias Crisp. "You are against imposing large Confessions of faith and raising needless disputes", Tallents astutely observed, "[y]ou will practise that now". And yet if Baxter was compelled to write - and he was - he should write as little as possible against only the greatest errors, magnify free grace as much as he could, frequently refer to his previous works, "and exasperate your adversaries as little as may be".¹³⁷

Tallent's advice was well reasoned and generous, but it was wasted on Baxter. From the mid-1670s he had shown considerable restraint, but Samuel Crisp's provocation was intolerable.¹³⁸

I see the corrupting Design is of late grown so high, that what seemed these Thirty Four Years suppressed, now threateneth as a torrent to overthrow the Gospel... . And therefore I dare neither give them my Name, nor be silent in such a common scandal and danger, while I can speak or write.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Crisp, *Compleat Works*, To the Reader.

¹³⁷ Francis Tallents to Baxter, 12 February 1689/90: DWL MS BC v. 125r (CCRB #1206).

¹³⁸ DWL MS BT v. 24r, item #143.

¹³⁹ Baxter, *Defence of Christ, And Free Grace*, To the Reader.

True to his word, Baxter had wasted no time in speaking out against Crisp's republication. Earlier, on 28 January 1690, during one of his lectures to his fellow London nonconformists at Pinners' Hall, he had angrily accused those twelve nonconformist witnesses of hanging out "*a sign to shew where Jezebel dwelt*".¹⁴⁰ Samuel Crisp was hardly impartial in his account of Baxter's lecture, but his astonishment at Baxter's reaction is plausible. He recalled that

I never heard a Sermon make more War and Confusion in the minds of Hearers than that did; insomuch as his Friends could not but pity him, and some thought that instead of Preaching he Raved, especially when he flew so in the face of many excellent Divines, that had countenanced the veracity of the Prefacer of the said book.¹⁴¹

Clearly, Baxter's response in the pulpit was both a vigorous and embarrassing one.¹⁴²

Baxter was no less vociferous in print, and here is the real reason why Tallents' advice was wasted: he was already much too late for this compulsive controversialist. Baxter had completed his *Scripture Gospel defended, And Christ, Grace and Free Justification Vindicated Against the Libertines* a whole month earlier.¹⁴³ This was composed of two treatises, mostly constructed in the late 1670s. They may have been designed for a different purpose in another context, but with nothing else to hand and limited energy to write more they still had their uses. The bulk of the second treatise, however, (*A Defence of Christ, And Free Grace: Against the Subverters, Commonly Called, Antinomians or Libertines*) was written "On the occasion of the reviving of those Errours, and the Reprinting and Reception of Dr. *Cripes* writings, and the dangerous subverting many Thousand honest Souls".¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Samuel Crisp, *Christ made Sin...Evinc't From Scripture Upon Occasion of An Exception taken at Pinners-Hall, 28 January, 1689[/90], 1690*, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Roger Thomas sees the sermon as "the first thunder clap in a storm that broke up Nonconformity", "Break-Up of Nonconformity", p. 54, and see p. 42.

¹⁴³ The book was finished by 15 January 1690 (Baxter, *Defence of Christ, And Free Grace*, To the Reader). Powicke mistakenly believes the book was published in January 1691 (Powicke, *Under the Cross*, p. 175, and see A. G. Matthews, *The Works of Richard Baxter. An Annotated List*, [1933], p. 47).

¹⁴⁴ Baxter, *Defence of Christ, And Free Grace*, title page.

Baxter's *Defence* was from first to last an attack on Tobias Crisp: a lengthy epistle to the reader was directed solely at Crisp's errors; a selective but accurate series of quotations from Crisp followed on its heels; and this in turn preceded a hostile address to the teachers of Crisp's doctrines. The text itself was a sustained demolition of Crisp's Antinomianism, laying waste to no less than one hundred Antinomian errors. The work was exclusive of all other considerations. No other of Baxter's anti-Antinomian works matched it for its concentrated focus and intensity. He might, with uncharacteristic generosity, have recognised the uprightness of the Antinomians' lives, but "it's no thanks to your irreligious Doctrine", he petulantly advised.¹⁴⁵ There would be few gracious concessions here. It was thoroughly hostile, hopelessly reactionary, and all very familiar.

The curious thing is that his *Defence of Christ* began by denying the need to do so. Baxter freely admitted that he had already written more than enough in other works; he was concerned not to stir up further controversy; and, most importantly, the errors of the Antinomians were so absurd that they were self-refuting.¹⁴⁶ "I have an opinion", he explained to his fictional companion, "that accidentally the Books which you fear will so effectually confute themselves, that they will occasion more good among sober knowing Christians than hurt to the ignorant professors".¹⁴⁷ Baxter had remembered one lesson at least, that Antinomian error could have an ironic effect. "A hundred" aspects of Antinomian doctrine "may be named, which have so ugly a countenance, that men that love their Souls, will be affrighted from *Antinomianism*, by the reading of them".¹⁴⁸ This was the first time Baxter looked on the bright side at the beginning of an assault on

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, To the Teachers of Dr. Crispe's Doctrine.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Antinomianism, yet the force of his reassurances was undermined by the fact that he published two treatises against Antinomianism. He had clearly reached that point, despite his comforting words, when “the acceptance and success of [Crisp’s] Book and such others, made our danger so notorious and great, as would clearly justify our Confutation”.¹⁴⁹ So rather than calming the “fear” of his companion, he simply exposed his own.

He was, however, not alone in his fears. This resurgence of Antinomianism disturbed a number of other people as well. Much later, Daniel Williams, a prominent Presbyterian nonconformist, recalled his disquiet at “the too visible Progress of Antinomianism” which had been “too much countenanced” and “greatly prevailing” in 1690.¹⁵⁰ Vincent Alsop, despite attaching his name to Crisp’s works, was appalled to see Antinomianism “*Triumphant*”.¹⁵¹ And William Bates, less dramatically, was worried by “the present peeping up of *Antinomianisme*”.¹⁵² Baxter was not alone in his concern, then, and the recrudescence of Antinomianism worried a wide range of people.

Antinomianism caused such agitation because the whole debate had wider implications. This was not simply a battle between Baxter and his familiar foes; much more was at stake. The Presbyterians and the Independents were about to attempt a “Happy Union”, but they were divided over just these soteriological issues. So when Crisp was republished and when Baxter made his outburst at Pinners’ Hall it threatened to shatter a fragile unity even before it had been begun. There was a very great need to

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ Daniel Williams, *An End to Discord, Wherein is demonstrated That no Doctrinal Controversy remains between the Presbyterian And Congregational Ministers*, 1699, pp. 7, 103.

¹⁵¹ Vincent Alsop, *A Faithful Rebuke To A False report: Lately Dispersed in a Letter To a Friend in the Country. Concerning Differences in Doctrinals*, 1697, p. 51.

¹⁵² William Bates, *Peace at Pinners-Hall Wish’d, and Attempted In A Pacifick Paper Touching The Universality of Redemption, the Conditionality of the Covenant of Grace*, 1692, p. 13. For these three men, see below, pp. 283, 284-285.

find some way of reconciling the two parties before the split calcified. It was in this context that, beginning in 1690 and extending into 1691, an intriguing exchange took place between Baxter and Thomas Beverley. Their correspondence helps to illuminate this wider significance, it also demonstrates the strength of feeling that Baxter attached to the issues involved, and it reveals the very real limits his fear of Antinomianism could impose upon even his closest relationships.

Thomas Beverley had been a fellow prisoner with Baxter in 1686.¹⁵³ They were the firmest of friends despite “formidable differences” that threatened to force them apart.

Beverley believed in a future millennium; Baxter in a past one. Beverley believed the Pope was Antichrist; Baxter did not. Beverley believed that the world would end in 1697; Baxter thought such speculations blasphemous. Beverley admired Dr Crisp’s Antinomianism; Baxter thought it poisonous.¹⁵⁴

In spite of these differences, these two men “had a great mutual respect. Baxter said of Beverley: ‘if he change not my judgment no man is likely to do it, so strong and candid is his judgment’”.¹⁵⁵ Baxter’s comment is important, because Beverley was about to try to do just that.

In a brief treatise of 1690 Thomas Beverley attempted the impossible: he set about “the Reconciling Dr. *Crisp’s Sermons* with Mr. *Baxter*”.¹⁵⁶ The whole debate was, Beverley proclaimed, “a seeming Controversie between the *Justification*, and the *Sanctification* of the *Gospel*, betwixt *Justifying Faith*, and *Good works*”.¹⁵⁷ Essentially, Beverley argued that Baxter and Crisp reflected two sides of the same theological coin.

¹⁵³ Baxter had been imprisoned by the notorious Judge Jeffreys, ostensibly for the subversive nature of his *Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685). He was released in November 1686. See Nuttall, *Richard Baxter*, pp. 109-110.

¹⁵⁴ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Beverley, *A Conciliatory Judgment Concerning Dr. Crisps’s Sermons, And Mr. Baxter’s Dissatisfactions in Them*, 1690, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Each man had singled out one part of a dual emphasis on grace and holiness, under the leading of the one Spirit.¹⁵⁸

Therefore, this was Beverley's own attempt at an end of doctrinal controversies, but it was very different in its emphases from Baxter's. Beverley bravely tried to strike a balance, but his effort was undermined by an already established preference for Tobias Crisp. "I professe concerning Dr Crispes Book", he had warned Baxter around April 1690, "I commend it".¹⁵⁹ So despite his undeniable regard for Baxter, this bias infiltrated his attempt at reconciliation. Beverley defended the proposition that since Christ's imputed righteousness was infinite, "Justification by it is Attributed to Faith without works, because an Infinite Righteousness can be only Receiv'd, and not Aided by our works, it can only be believd in, not helpd out by any thing in us".¹⁶⁰ Such a proposition was, of course, anathema to Baxter, but worse was to come. "I am perswaded", Beverley enthused,

Dr. Crisp was rais'd up on purpose by God to Break that *Box of Spikenard*, that sent out so High, and Sweet a savour of Christ... . [And] I am much perswaded, [that Crisp's] preaching these Sermons was before a notable Breaking out of Gospel Light, and Truth, and a Dawn of the *Kingdom of Christ* in his *Redemption*.¹⁶¹

Crisp's Antinomianism in the 1640s may have been a "breaking out" of many things, but for Baxter it could never have been a dispensation of new light.

Baxter was utterly scornful of what he saw as Beverley's flawed attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. In a private treatise extending to ten folios, originally intended for publication,¹⁶² Baxter berated Beverley for his "pretended reconciliation"

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Beverley to Baxter, [c.late April-early May 1690]: DWL MS BC iii. 37r (CCRB #1208).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁶² This was Baxter's stated intention, but he later crossed it out. Baxter to Thomas Beverley, 18 May 1690: DWL MS BT vii. 48v, item #224 (CCRB #1210). He changed his mind because of Beverley's apparent willingness to retract his support of Crisp, Richard Baxter, *Reply To Mr. Tho. Beverley's Answer To My Reasons Against his Doctrine of the Thousand Years Middle Kingdom, and of the Conversion of the Jews*, 1691, p. 2.

and his support of Crisp.¹⁶³ He attacked at length Beverley's central proposition that Christ's infinite righteousness needed no other from the believer.¹⁶⁴ He sternly warned Beverley that he would not be held "guiltlesse of the ruine of all the souls that perish" and "the scandall and reproach that will fall on Christianity or on Protestants or on the Church of England by [his] entertainment of these pernicious errors".¹⁶⁵ He dredged up all his usual objections to Antinomian doctrine: it converted Christ into the worst of sinners; it made infidels as righteous as God Himself; and it affirmed that sin could do no harm, while works could do no good.¹⁶⁶ And in his conclusion Baxter explained that he had been patient with Beverley for a long time over different issues, but it was the last straw when Beverley "came to the extolling of Dr Crispes Antichristianity as precious light".¹⁶⁷ Millenarian fancies might be tolerated, but Beverley's Antinomian inclinations were a strain on their relationship too great to bear.

The dispute dragged on. In April 1691 Beverley wrote back professing his unwillingness to be pursued in controversy by a man he so deeply respected.¹⁶⁸ Baxter was happy to declare a truce; Beverley subsequently aired his opinions again; Baxter chastised him for it;¹⁶⁹ and in May 1691 Beverley replied by protesting his innocence of Baxter's implication of Antinomianism.

I can humbly call God, and man to witnesse, I never in any Preaching, or printing to my utmost knowledg used any Expression, Tending that way, that if you Can Find any such word as your Letter mentions; or any Thing Tending that way, I will Freely Fall under your Heavyst Censure... I speak wholly in your manner of discourse.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶³ Baxter to Thomas Beverley, 18 May 1690: DWL MS BT vii. 39r, item #224 (CCRB #1210).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vii. 39v-42v.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, vii. 42v.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, vii. 43v.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, vii. 48v. In addition, see Baxter's brief but aggressive public refutation of Beverley's efforts in Baxter, *Reply To Mr. Tho. Beverley's Answer*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ Thomas Beverley to Baxter, 4 April 1691: DWL MS BC v. 239 (CCRB #1229).

¹⁶⁹ Baxter to [Thomas Beverley], [c.mid-April 1691]: DWL MS BT vii. 100r, item #233 (CCRB #1233).

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Beverley to Baxter, This Instant 15 [May?] 1691: DWL MS BC v. 92v (CCRB #1237).

Beverley also defended Tobias Crisp, who “sayd nothing, but what you your self doe Acknowledg; Even a Full and perfect Satisfaction of Christ for the Sinns of all his Elect, that does not depend on our grace or duties”.¹⁷¹ And he bravely reasserted his original claim. “I doe deeply (pardon the Expression) Thinke, Dr Crispes Sermons are Reconcileable, even to your owne doctrine. ...I hope, That is no Libertinism”.¹⁷² Beverley stuck to his guns, but like others before him he may have been regretting his decision ever to tangle with Baxter, especially over Antinomianism.

Baxter’s reply is not extant, but it clearly offered no concessions. In the final letter of the exchange Beverley mourned Baxter’s conviction that he “cannot be Silent without a Sin of omission”. He begged to be looked on as a moderator, not an opponent.¹⁷³ Worn down and weary, Beverley’s last word was a humble request: “I desire but the same moderating Favor, you have shown in your Late Book; An End of Controversy; And It shall be with you, Sir, An End of All Strife”.¹⁷⁴

It was rather a lame - and predictable - ending to a futile effort to achieve the impossible. Beverley must have been aware of Baxter’s abiding hatred of Tobias Crisp, and his attempt at reconciliation seems naïve, even foolish. However, such a conclusion, though tempting, would be unfair to Thomas Beverley. His project must be seen as part of that larger need to reconcile the soteriological inclinations of the Independents and Presbyterians as they embarked on their own attempt at a “Happy Union”. That was doomed to failure as well, and it was not long before the two groups were meeting at the same hour on the same day, but at different halls.¹⁷⁵ Both

171

Ibid.

172

Ibid., v. 93r.

173

Thomas Beverley to Baxter, 2 [June?] 1691: DWL MS BC iv. 189r (CCRB #1244).

174

Ibid., iv. 190r.

175

Thomas, “Break-Up of Nonconformity”, p. 47.

conciliatory attempts were commendable, but in the end impossible. The prospect of Antinomianism, real or imagined, was too divisive and threatening ever to be easily tolerated, on both a public and a private scale.

Baxter's exchange with Beverley is very revealing. It demonstrates once again how tiresome and wearying a disputer Baxter could be, even right at the end of his life. It shows, as well, that Antinomianism was always for him an issue of the greatest significance and danger. It could never be tolerated among Christians, and it was just as unwelcome in even the closest relationships. Antinomianism was always, right to the end, too great a price to pay for unity and fellowship. There would be no concessions, no reprieve, even for Thomas Beverley. The two had been close friends for many years, they had shared a prison cell together, yet at the height of his concern Baxter was prepared to level the wildest allegations. His tactic of attributing the most extreme implications to the mildest of men with the most harmless of doctrines continued to the end. Antinomianism brought out the worst of his belligerence, and corroded the closest relationships.

The fears behind Baxter's response were similar in nature to his earlier concerns of the 1640s. Indeed, the context of this recrudescence bore an uncanny resemblance to the first. To apply the analysis of Kai Erikson, England had moved through a radical, if rather painless, "realignment of power"; it had again witnessed "a period of unsettling historical change". Another Stuart king had been removed - even if he had fled himself - and moral boundaries had to be re-cemented. As in 1649, important questions for the future were again being settled. And then, to Baxter's dismay, Tobias Crisp intruded into this delicately poised scene. It was not just his theology that was so disconcerting, it was the connotation that he brought with him in that context. It inevitably brought

back all the fears and disappointments of the civil war and Interregnum periods, and they were just as real in 1690 as they were in 1649 or 1659.¹⁷⁶ It was the timing of Crisp's republication that seemed so unfortunate, because, as Lamont explains, "Baxter had wound up...in 1691, with his 1659 programme. William III had to complete the task begun by Richard Cromwell. The Antinomian still threatened Protestant union. John Owen had destroyed Richard Cromwell; his heirs - the supporters of Dr Crisp - must not destroy William III".¹⁷⁷ The similarities were significant, the prospects the same; this new settlement could also be betrayed from within. So often Antinomianism, or its broader vehicle of Independency, had wreaked havoc in England and wrecked Baxter's cherished plans and hopes. When Crisp reappeared in 1690 the potential was there for it to do so all over again. Certainly Crisp's *Compleat Works* was a personal affront to Baxter, but its doctrine was also (as always) seen as a substantial threat to England's religion and stability. And it was this which invested Baxter's reaction with so much intensity and concern; it left him aghast and dismayed.

This final recrudescence of Baxter's Antinomian concern may have been brief, then, but it was very suggestive about the deep fears that compelled him fiercely to respond, the limits those concerns could place upon his endeavours and relationships, and the belligerence with which he refused to yield to Antinomianism at any time, in any place, in any man. And yet, in December 1691 he did relinquish his place in the battle, but there were others waiting and eager to fill it. This last Antinomian controversy of the century extended past Baxter's death and well on into the decade. Had he been alive at its conclusion, though, Baxter would have rejoiced to witness the final defeat of his life-long foe.

¹⁷⁶ See Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 308.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

In his recent PhD thesis on John Howe, Martin Sutherland suggests that the historiography of later Stuart dissent has suffered from “generations of Baxterisation”, in which historians have often “fastened solely on Richard Baxter”, analysing the development of dissent in terms of his “legacy”.¹⁷⁸ As a result, the more significant contribution of John Howe has been undermined and obscured.¹⁷⁹ Sutherland concludes that “the ghost of Richard Baxter must be laid to rest”.¹⁸⁰ Inevitably such a contention is difficult to prove. One way of assessing its merit is to explore Baxter’s “presence” in the Antinomian debate after his death. This was a controversy to which he had made frequent, lengthy contributions, and if he were to have an impact anywhere, it would be here. Of course, analysing the extent to which Baxter was used in this debate will also be valuable in more general terms. While it is an easy task to measure the number of Baxter’s publications against the Antinomians, it is much more difficult to assess how enthusiastically they were received by his contemporaries. It is not easy, in other words, to gauge Baxter’s part in the seventeenth-century “rise of moralism”. A full answer is impossible, of course, but measuring his use in this controversy is one way of suggesting some possibilities.

The debate is useful, then. The way in which Baxter was employed, and how frequently, will indicate just how important a figure he was in the minds of his contemporaries, and how large a shadow he cast over late-seventeenth-century English nonconformity. There was certainly enough for his contemporaries to appeal to, and if he was ignored altogether this might suggest - it would certainly not prove - that, as an authority, he was not as significant as his historians have supposed. Of course, it can

¹⁷⁸ Martin Sutherland, “Strange Fire: John Howe and the Alienation and Fragmentation of Later Stuart Dissent”, PhD thesis, Canterbury, New Zealand, 1995, pp. 6, 10, 15, 352.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 332, 339.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

only ever be an indication. To begin with, it is only feasible to consider a selection (albeit a large one) of publications that emerged from the debate.¹⁸¹ This type of source material is rather narrow, and it embraces only a limited number of players. Also, the debate was carried on mostly within London. Thus the conclusions here can only be indicative, but they will still have value.

It is necessary first to describe the main players and the development of this post-Baxterian Antinomian controversy. It is no surprise to discover that there were two sides to the debate: those who approved of Tobias Crisp and those who did not. Obviously it was the latter whose views resonated with those of Baxter, and among this group there were several with close connections to him. Chief among them was Daniel Williams, who had been Baxter's "closest associate" in his later years.¹⁸² Williams conceived of Antinomianism in just the same hostile terms as Baxter,¹⁸³ and constructed his defence against it in a similar way. He emphasised the role of God as rector, His power to enable the elect to perform the conditions of the covenant, and to persevere in a state of gradual justification.¹⁸⁴ Of all of these voices, Williams spoke most loudly in Baxterian terms. In fact, he was criticised for "vainly pretending" to fill Baxter's place.¹⁸⁵

Williams led the way, but he was joined by an old friend of Baxter, John Humfrey. Regular correspondence between the two began in 1654, and after the

¹⁸¹ I am grateful to J. Hay Colligan for highlighting the main texts of the debate in his article, "The Antinomian Controversy", *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, 6 (1915), pp. 389-396. I have consulted almost thirty of those books.

¹⁸² Roger Thomas, *Daniel Williams: 'Presbyterian Bishop'*, 1964, p. 5. Quoted in *CCRB*, I. xxxi, n. 49.

¹⁸³ See, for example, Daniel Williams, *A Defence Of Gospel Truth. Being a Reply to Mr Chancy's First Part And an Explication of the Points in Debate*, 1693, To the Reader.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12; Daniel Williams, *Man made Righteous By Christ's Obedience. Being two Sermons At Pinners-Hall*, 1694, pp. 75-76.

¹⁸⁵ Chauncey, *Neonomianism Unmask'd*, I. 10; Stephen Lobb, *An Appeal To the Right Reverend Edward Lord Bishop of Worcester, And The Reverend Dr. Edwards*, 1698, p. 10.

Restoration both were nonconformists who worked for comprehension.¹⁸⁶ Humfrey's first contribution to the debate was the second edition of his 1674 work, *Mediocria: Or The Middle Way*. Significantly, it began with a written endorsement from Baxter that was not present in the first edition.¹⁸⁷ Humfrey sounded more Arminian than Williams, arguing that Christ's redemption only ever provided salvation upon condition, but the two were essentially in harmony.¹⁸⁸ Humfrey vehemently objected to the proposition that Christ's righteousness was imputed more substantially than just in its effects.¹⁸⁹

A number of others joined in the fray at various times. William Lorimer was one such antagonist. Baxter had provided an introductory epistle to one of Lorimer's earlier books, in which he described him as "my greatly valued Friend, well known by me to be a man of Learning and Judgment".¹⁹⁰ It is no surprise, then, to see him fighting against Antinomianism. William Bates also offered an early contribution to the debate. He had preached Baxter's funeral sermon, he allied himself with the moderate opponents of Antinomianism (such as Baxter had been), and he spoke in similar terms to Baxter, arguing that "the Law is not *Abrogated*, nor *Ceased*, but *Relaxed*" and that Christians will be judged by it.¹⁹¹ The last major player on the anti-Antinomian side was Vincent Alsop, whose first contribution appeared only in 1697. Ironically, he had signed his name to the certificate that fronted the republication of Crisp in 1690, a point of some embarrassment in the course of this later debate,¹⁹² but he quickly joined the

¹⁸⁶ See CCRB, I. 138.

¹⁸⁷ John Humfrey, *Mediocria: Or The Middle Way Between Protestant and Papist: In a paper of Justification*, 2nd ed., 1695, sig. A4v.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁸⁹ John Humfrey, *Pacification Touching the Doctrinal Dissent Among our United Brethren in London*, 1696, p. 24.

¹⁹⁰ William Lorimer, *An Excellent Discourse Proving the Divine Original and Authority Of The Five Books Of Moses*, 1682, [Baxter's] epistle to the reader.

¹⁹¹ Bates, *Peace at Pinners-Hall Wish'd*, pp. 15, 16.

¹⁹² Vincent Alsop, *A Vindication Of The Faithful Rebuke To A False Report Against The Rude Cavils of the Pretended Defence*, 1698, pp. 34-35.

ranks of Crisp's detractors once the collection appeared. There appears to have been little link between Alsop and Baxter.

On the other side of the debate, producing much the same number of contributions towards it, were the "Antinomians". Their early champion was Samuel Crisp himself. Baxter certainly played a part in Samuel Crisp's 1690 work, *Christ made Sin*, if only as the object of his angry abuse.¹⁹³ Crisp played a crucial part in sparking the debate, but this was his last contribution to it. The unofficial mantle of leadership then fell on Isaac Chauncey, who contributed a number of works in 1692 and 1693, mostly in opposition to the writings of Daniel Williams. In addition there were a couple of cameo actors: in 1695 Nathaniel Mather added his views to the debate;¹⁹⁴ and a year later Thomas Goodwin sent to the press his refutation of William Lorimer.¹⁹⁵

As the debate dragged on, however, Stephen Lobb increasingly, and surprisingly, came to dominate the Antinomian side of the debate. Baxter and Lobb had been in contact since at least the late 1670s when Lobb had offered his comments on the manuscript of the first part of Baxter's *Scripture Gospel Defended*. Baxter had discovered in Lobb's comments "so much Judgment and moderation and so little, if any thing contrary to what I assert".¹⁹⁶ Moreover, in the initial heat of the Crispian controversy in January 1690 Baxter had recommended Lobb's book, *The Glory of Free-Grace Display'd*. "It is so considerable a confutation of Antinomian errors", he enthused, "that I commend it to thy reading".¹⁹⁷ Indeed it was; there Lobb denounced

¹⁹³ Samuel Crisp, *Christ made Sin*.

¹⁹⁴ Nathaniel Mather, *The Righteousness of God Through Faith Upon All without Difference who believe*, 1694.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Goodwin, *A Discourse Of The True Nature Of The Gospel. Demonstrating That it is no New Law, but a pure Doctrine of Grace*, 1695.

¹⁹⁶ Baxter, *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, p. 75. Lobb was identified on p. 73. His original comments are found in Stephen Lobb to Baxter, [c. late 1678]: DWL MS BC i. 42r-47r, (CCRB #1023).

¹⁹⁷ Baxter, *Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification*, p. 73.

the followers of Dr Crisp as the abusers of true grace; he lamented the influence of John Saltmarsh; he disagreed with justification from eternity; he denounced strict imputation in the sense that Christ took upon himself the filth of sin; and he emphasised the need for holiness.¹⁹⁸ Lobb's book was a way of redeeming the Independents and John Owen from the charge of Antinomianism, and his work carried a brief note from Owen approving, for the most part, of his efforts.¹⁹⁹

These earlier sympathies with Baxter make it all the more mysterious that Lobb should appear a decade later on the side that he did, and this was not lost on his critics. Vincent Alsop was very quick to point out Lobb's transformation from being a "downright *Baxterian*" to an apparent supporter of Crisp.²⁰⁰ Lobb did undergo a change, but it was one of perception rather than position. His first publication in the 1690s debate, *A Peaceable Enquiry*, was a much-needed plea for moderation. He patiently explained that the "Antinomians" did not want to bring in sinful licence, and that the "Arminians" (a label just as polemical and unjustified as Antinomianism) did not seek to diminish free grace. In substance, if not in appearance, the two sides agreed on the same things.²⁰¹ However, as time went on, he later explained, Lobb's position hardened on the side of the Antinomians as he discovered upon careful search that their objections were actually justified, and that the two parties did not agree either in substance or appearance.²⁰² His own position had not shifted all that much, but his perception of the Antinomians' opponents had.

¹⁹⁸ Stephen Lobb, *The Glory of Free-Grace Display'd: ... Wherein The Followers of Dr Crispe are prov'd to be Abusers of the true Gospel-Notion of Free-Grace*, 1680, "To the Reader", pp. 14-15, 21, 34-36, 53-64.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, appendix, pp. xvii-xviii. For Owen's note see his brief epistle to the reader. It is unlikely that Lobb actually convinced Baxter of Owen's innocence, or that of the Independents in general.

²⁰⁰ Alsop, *Vindication Of The Faithful Rebuke*, pp. 5, 6, 26.

²⁰¹ Stephen Lobb, *A Peaceable Enquiry Into the Nature Of the Present Controversie Among our United Brethren About Justification*, 1693, pp. 15-16.

²⁰² Lobb, *Appeal*, p. 2.

Perceptions were all important. What is so illuminating about the debate is that each side was beset by a number of fears about the other. As Lobb pointed out in his initial appeal for moderation, each party moved away from what it feared and was accused of inclining to the opposite extreme.²⁰³ On one side Williams and his supporters were desperately afraid of Antinomianism. They worried over Crisp's influence on the profane, the ignorant and "the younger sort" at a time when religion appeared to be "dying".²⁰⁴ Vincent Alsop fretted that it would usher in all the "Extravagances" and "dregs of Antinomianism".²⁰⁵ Likewise, William Lorimer was sure that while Crisp's doctrines might not actually have been Antinomian in themselves, they did not "seem sufficient to secure Men from *real Antinomianism*".²⁰⁶ These writers all wanted to construct a hedge around God and His grace to prevent them from Antinomian abuse.²⁰⁷

In response, Isaac Chauncey pointed out that God was entirely capable of protecting Himself without men's additional barriers in the way of grace;²⁰⁸ but he and his colleagues wanted a "Hedge" of their own.²⁰⁹ They were very worried about the spread of Socinianism, especially later on in the decade. Stephen Lobb put it most succinctly:

It must be observed, That this Nation having been of late Years pestered with Swarms of Socinian Books, and their Errors, so amazingly prevailing amongst many, it was apprehended, that our greatest Danger would be from the Writings of some; who tho they expressed their Dislike of Socinianism, yet ventured such Notions, as had a Tendency to promote the Designs of

²⁰³ Lobb, *Peaceable Enquiry*, pp. 17-18.

²⁰⁴ Daniel Williams, *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated: Wherein some of Dr Crisp's Opinions Are Considered; And The Opposite Truths Are Plainly Stated and Confirmed*, 1692, title page, To the Reader; William Lorimer, *An Apology For The Ministers Who Subscribed only unto the Stating of The Truths and Errours In Mr. Williams Book*, 1694, title page.

²⁰⁵ Alsop, *Faithful Rebuke*, p. 10, *Vindication*, p. 8.

²⁰⁶ William Lorimer, *Remarks On The R. Mr. Goodwins Discourse of the Gospel*, 1696, p. 151. Lorimer explained that a "Man is certainly a most real *Antinomian* if he be once of the perswasion that he is not bound either by Law or Gospel to believe in Christ, to repent of his Sins, and to lead a Holy Life".

²⁰⁷ Alsop, *Faithful Rebuke*, pp. 51-52.

²⁰⁸ Chauncey, *Neonomianism Unmask'd*, III. 85.

²⁰⁹ Stephen Lobb, *A Report Of The Present State Of The Differences in Doctrinals, Between Some Dissenting Ministers In London*, 1697, p. 4.

our Adversaries who were apprehensive of it, and would not lose so considerable an Advantage.²¹⁰

Not surprisingly, behind all these fears lay Roman Catholicism. About popery and Arminianism, Thomas Goodwin confessed "I am terribly afraid of coming in any nearness to the danger. ...[I]t concerns Every Minister of the Gospel, to put a stop to any Opinion which hath the least tendency to Arminianism".²¹¹ So there were deep compulsions at work in this debate, and its vehemence and persistence should not be surprising.

The controversy began, of course, with the republication of Crisp in 1690. After Baxter died Daniel Williams took his place as a nonconformist leader, providing the initial impetus to the debate. In fact, Chauncey accused him of prolonging a debate that should have died with Baxter.²¹² Opposition also to Richard Davis, who "preached an ultra-Calvinistic theology" in Rothwell, Northamptonshire, added fuel to the flames.²¹³ Various attempts at conciliation were proposed, but none was successful. In 1692 Isaac Chauncey introduced the concept of a "Neonomian" - one who admitted that the old law had been abrogated, but believed that a new one had been erected in its place²¹⁴ - which aroused a chorus of complaint. He referred to Baxter as "a certain zealous Neonomian".²¹⁵ There were regular suggestions the debate was finally waning - in 1694 Williams fumed that Nathaniel Mather had revived a debate that had almost died, two years later John Humfrey attempted to reopen the wound so that it could fully be healed,

²¹⁰ Lobb, *Appeal*, p. 46. For other expressions of the Antinomians' fear of Socinianism see Lobb, *Report*, p. 4, *The Growth of Error: Being An Exercitation Concerning The Rise and progress of Arminianism, and more especially Socinianism, both abroad, and now of late in England*, 1697, preface; Mather, *Righteousness of God*, To the Reader.

²¹¹ Goodwin, *Discourse*, To the Reader.

²¹² Chauncey, *Neonomianism Unmask'd*, I. 10.

²¹³ Colligan, "Antinomian Controversy", pp. 392-393.

²¹⁴ Chauncey, *Neonomianism Unmask'd*, epistle dedicatory, I. 2.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 10.

and in 1698 Lobb made a similar attempt for exactly the same reasons²¹⁶ - but the list of publications revealed no pause at all in these years. Throughout the debate it was the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers that remained the bone of contention, although the penal sanctions of the law also came under discussion.²¹⁷ Various attempts at reconciliation were made in 1694, 1696 and 1697,²¹⁸ but the debate ended only in 1699 with a declaration from the Independents that effectively renounced an Antinomian interpretation of soteriology. Williams greeted it with relief in his *End to Discord*,²¹⁹ and that is what it was. Antinomianism had finally been silenced.

This was, then, a debate with close connections to Baxter. Before his death he had been involved with some of its major players, he had sifted through the same issues many times, and, as Stephen Lobb pointed out, Baxter himself had done such a good job of demolishing Antinomianism that there was no need for these later pretenders to do the same again.²²⁰ Indeed, Baxter had written so voluminously on the subject that it would be reasonable to find the man and his works acting as an authority and an opponent even after his death. But in 1695 John Humfrey complained that this was not the case. Humfrey was "offended" that a man of "constant Piety and Integrity" like Baxter who made the refuting of the Antinomians "his very business" should then be ignored by those who followed after him, "regarding him no more than one that had never been, or had wrote nothing about these matters".²²¹ As surprising as it seems, Humfrey's perception was correct; Baxter was not a major figure in the debate.

²¹⁶ Williams, *Man made Righteous*, To the Reader; Humfrey, *Pacification*, p. 3; Lobb, *Appeal*, To the Reader.

²¹⁷ Humfrey, *Pacification*, p. 4; Alsop, *Faithful Rebuke*, p. 17; Lobb, *Report*, p. 5.

²¹⁸ Williams, *End to Discord*, pp. 22-25.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²²⁰ Lobb, *Appeal*, p. 13. John Humfrey made the same point, *Pacification*, p. 26.

²²¹ Humfrey, *Mediocrity*, 2nd ed., pp. 60-61.

There were, inevitably, occasions when Baxter was discussed. For example, Daniel Williams felt compelled to defend him on several occasions.²²² His decision along with Matthew Sylvester to publish Baxter's *Protestant Religion Truly Stated* could be seen as an attempt to bring Baxter into the debate, since the issues Williams highlighted in his preface to the work were central to the controversy, but not the book itself.²²³ John Humfrey, the one who complained of Baxter's absence, also mentioned him fondly on quite a number of occasions.²²⁴ Vincent Alsop mentioned him once, but preferred to let him rest in peace.²²⁵ And in 1699, after Stephen Lobb had come within a whisker of accusing Baxter of Socinianism,²²⁶ John Edwards wrote a rebuttal in his *Plea For the Late Accurate and Excellent Mr. Baxter*.²²⁷ Naturally enough it defended Baxter's reputation, but it was considerably more a defence of Edward's own position which had also been challenged by Lobb. Still, Edwards injected a fresh emphasis on Baxter into the dying debate, claiming his words as "*the Truth*, that must secure us from the Impious and to be abhorr'd Blasphemy of *Antinomianism*".²²⁸

For all these references, however, Baxter was very often conspicuous by his absence. Take Daniel Williams as an example. In his *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated* (1692) he appealed regularly to the Savoy Conference, John Owen, John Norton, John Flavel, the Westminster Assembly and the New England Synod, but never Baxter. A year later, in his *Defence Of Gospel Truth*, he frequently cited (among others)

²²² For instance, see Williams, *Defence*, pp. 46-47, *Man made Righteous*, pp. 184, 186, *End to Discord*, p. 67.

²²³ Those issues were "the moral freedom of the Will of an unregenerate man, conditional Election, and the Merit of good Works". Richard Baxter, *The Protestant Religion Truly Stated And Justified: By the late Reverend Mr. Richard Baxter, Prepared for the Press some time before his Death*, 1692, [Williams and Sylvester's] epistle to the reader.

²²⁴ For example, see Humfrey, *Pacification*, pp. 4, 5, 6, 8, 14, 17, 26, 38, 39.

²²⁵ Alsop, *Vindication*, p. 28.

²²⁶ Lobb, *Appeal*, To the Reader.

²²⁷ John Edwards, *A Plea For the Late Accurate and Excellent Mr. Baxter, And those that Speak of the Sufferings of Christ as he does. In Answer To Mr. Lobb's Insinuated Charge of Socinianism*, 1699.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Richard Hooker, Peter Bulkley, Thomas Goodwin, William Ames, Thomas Manton, Samuel Rutherford, William Shepperd and Owen, but only once to Baxter. William Lorimer was much the same. His books were invariably crammed with appeals to a number of authorities - John Calvin, Martin Luther, Theodore Beza, William Twisse, Thomas Gataker, John Ball, Constant Jessop, Owen, Rutherford and Ames, to name a few - but he mentioned Baxter only on one occasion. The same is generally true of every other author in the debate. And when Vincent Alsop, to choose a final example, recalled the genesis of that debate he made no mention of Baxter's contribution.²²⁹ It was as if he had never broached the subject at all.

This is an interesting point, because John Owen was regularly cited in the course of the debate, and mostly by those who opposed the Antinomian point of view. They were much more eager to embrace him as an authority than Baxter, quoting him more frequently and at much greater length. Vincent Alsop might have ignored Baxter, but he was "mightily taken with the thoughts of that Judicious, Wise and Learned Person Dr. Owen", whom he intended to use frequently to justify his argument.²³⁰ He often dropped in "a Judicious and Moderate Saying of the Learned" Dr Owen.²³¹ For all his being Baxter's successor, Daniel Williams also made more use of John Owen.²³² So too did William Lorimer, among others.²³³ John Owen had a louder voice in this debate than Richard Baxter, and the comparison is suggestive.

It is possible to take these findings too far, and the limitations outlined earlier must be kept in mind, but it would seem that these disputants were reluctant to use

²²⁹ Alsop, *Faithful Rebuke*, pp. 15-16.

²³⁰ Alsop, *Vindication*, p. 10.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²³² For instance, see Williams, *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated*, p. 41, *Man made Righteous*, pp. 229, 233.

²³³ Lorimer, *Apology*, pp. 23, 70, 71, *Remarks*, preface, pp. 53, 93, 110, 161.

Baxter in their defence. The preference for John Owen over Baxter is the telling factor. There are at least two possible explanations for this, and both are plausible. First, to put it bluntly, Owen had been dead for longer.²³⁴ This gave him added distance from, and implied impartiality in, these heated events. It was, in other words, safer to appeal to him. By 1690 Baxter was an old man, and many must have viewed him as such. His outburst at Pinners' Hall was an embarrassment. Simply by being so old, and so fresh in the memory, Baxter might not have been a credible authority on which to base an important argument. If any figure became an authority in this debate it was not nonconformity's arch-anti-Antinomian, instead it was the one he accused of Antinomianism. It made sense for these anti-Antinomians to use Owen against their opponents where they could, but it was deeply ironic.

The second possible explanation for Baxter's absence is that these combatants preferred to appeal to a different tradition within nonconformity, one extending through the Savoy Conference of 1658 and linked more closely with toleration than comprehension. Even by the early 1670s Baxter's loyalty to comprehension seemed out of place, and by the early 1690s it was clearly a wasted sentiment. The Toleration Act, not the Bill for Comprehension, passed through parliament in 1689.²³⁵ And the only figure who lamented Baxter's absence from the debate, John Humphrey, was himself a man who had argued for comprehension, not toleration.

It would appear that Sutherland's contention is correct. There is a case for arguing that Baxter's importance to later Stuart dissent has been overstated by historians, and that other, younger players have been wrongly overlooked. And yet, with that concession made, Baxter remains a fascinating and vital figure in the period.

²³⁴

He died in 1683.

²³⁵

Seaward, *Restoration*, p. 146.

His long career may in the end have lost some of its former standing and influence, but it always remained colourful, revealing, suggestive and marvellously interesting. His is still a career worthy of deep historical interest, if not entirely for the reasons that previous historians have supposed.

The seventeenth-century inexorably came to an end, then, and so did these two fierce combatants, Richard Baxter and Antinomianism. Baxter, who so often found himself on the losing side, in the right place at the wrong time, finally played on the winning team, though he did not live to see it. His repeated fixation with Antinomianism was certainly an issue of doctrinal truth, but it was always much more than that. During the 1670s it had been a useful polemical weapon against the Independents. It was also a feature of his debates against specific individuals - John Bunyan, Thomas Tully and John Troughton - in much the same way as it had helped to shape his secondary disputations of the 1650s. In the 1690s, though, the context of uncertainty and direct Crispian connections served to rekindle some of Baxter's earlier fears. During this brief period his campaign against Antinomianism was more than just a polemical affair, it was another effort to prevent Antinomianism from wreaking further havoc in England. These wider fears were enough to jeopardise the "Happy Union" of the nonconformists, and other players were left unsuccessfully to repair the damage. Antinomianism may have had its greatest impact on Baxter during the 1640s and early 1650s, but it still had its uses well after the Restoration. Thus Antinomianism is the marker by which Baxter's soteriological progress through the whole of this eventful century can be charted, and it remains a useful way of understanding the man, his ways, his times, his fears and his complexities.

CONCLUSION

It is important, William Lamont warned at the end of his *Millennium*, “to realise how lightly this book has touched upon a career of such outstanding range and depth”.¹ The same might be said of this thesis. For more than just the remarkable breadth of his career, Richard Baxter is a challenge for any historian. His imposing and almost unceasing publications are not easily absorbed, and behind them is a man whose forceful personality remains; a man who is at once profuse in his self-revelation, yet deceptive in his self-justification. The sheer bulk of his written record, published and private, serves both as a help and a hindrance. To understand Baxter is to traverse a vast landscape of evidence in which it is just as easy to become lost and bewildered as it is difficult to tame the unyielding and unfamiliar terrain. There are, then, inevitable limits to the success of any historian seeking to recapture the truth about Baxter. Achieving both breadth and depth is impossible, as Lamont concedes, and one must be abandoned for the other.

And yet, these boundaries acknowledged, this thesis has suggested a number of new insights which may go some way towards building a deeper understanding of Baxter. First, there has been a re-evaluation of Richard Baxter, the man. A basic premise, not always appreciated by earlier historians, has been that if Baxter is to be

¹ Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 286.

understood at all, he must be accepted in all of his failings; he has to be recognisably human, he has to be held in balance. Baxter had his strengths: a gift for systematic analysis and expression; an ability to move his readers through the written word; and a sincere desire for the good of souls. He also had his weaknesses: an aggressive, self-defensive and controversially inclined personality; an easy ability to give offence; and an intractable compulsion to speak the truth, with no thought to context and no place for self-doubt. More specifically, like all men and women, Baxter viewed his world subjectively through a lens coloured by the fears and desires that gripped him, fears of sin and disorder, desires for the gospel and good behaviour. He was also given to change and to flux. There has been no attempt, then, to confer saintliness on Baxter. It has been necessary instead to be rather less trusting of his own admissions, to be more cognisant of contemporary criticisms, and to accept a Baxter completely at home in the seventeenth century.

Such a context can be bewildering for the historian. Recapturing the assumptions of the inhabitants of the seventeenth century without lapsing into misplaced confidence or sheer frustration is no easy task. Understanding the role and reality of Antinomianism in the broader context of seventeenth-century England reflects this difficulty. Everyone, it seems, used the word, yet each with a different shade of meaning. To Baxter it was the death of true Christian doctrine and practice. To Tobias Crisp and John Saltmarsh, however, their doctrine was simply the best means of affirming the glory of grace, of exalting Christ's free redemption and of inspiring a life of holiness and obedience. Though he might have disowned them, these Antinomians were Luther's offspring. They attempted to safeguard his defining principle of salvation by faith alone without works

and without qualification. In seventeenth-century England, though, their voice was steadily marginalised and finally extinguished.

This raises searching questions about the nature of these supposed radicals. The Antinomians who consumed Baxter's attention were entirely conservative in their ambitions, seeking to reclaim an earlier soteriological emphasis they felt had been lost. They were not the immoral and politically subversive radicals that Baxter and so many historians have assumed them to be. Indeed, Baxter and his contemporaries have led astray historians who are prepared to take on trust the testimony of contemporary sources, who have their own historiographical agendas anyway, and who are not prepared to listen closely to what the Antinomians actually said. Tobias Crisp and John Saltmarsh, for example, have required some redeeming.

Furthermore, this thesis also casts doubt on the reality of a Protestant consensus in seventeenth-century England. The Antinomians were among the most loyal to the fundamental message of the Protestant Reformation, yet among the most vilified by their contemporaries. Baxter was prepared to defend even Roman Catholic soteriology from malice and misinterpretation, but he was not willing to do the same for Antinomianism. English Protestantism stood relatively firm in the early 1600s, but as the century progressed (and especially as England experienced severe ecclesiastical and political pressures) the ideal which lay at its heart threatened to tear the fabric apart. Any Protestant consensus was fragile at best, and, in soteriological terms at least, the Protestant reformation in England disintegrated as free grace gave way to moralism.

Antinomianism existed only in the eye of the beholder. It would be erroneous, then, to suggest that Baxter misinterpreted Antinomianism - there was little to misinterpret - but he certainly misunderstood Crisp and Saltmarsh. For all his strained

logic these men never argued for a sinful God, they never discarded the moral law, and they never promoted a life of sinful indulgence. Baxter's accusation of heresy and his fears for the havoc which their doctrine might wreak were unnecessary and unjustified. Then why was he drawn to oppose them so vehemently and tenaciously?

The answer has much to do with his own temperament. Baxter was a man given to strong views, even in seventeenth-century terms. He was always much more likely to criticise the faults of his opponents than to contemplate his own, and he was determined to fight for the truth as he saw it. The Antinomians, he believed, were in error, thus he was inevitably drawn in to oppose them. Compounding this opposition were his pastoral inclinations. Theory and practice were firmly linked in his mind, and he was convinced that serious error resulted in lax practice. As a conscientious pastor he had little tolerance for the prospect. In addition, Baxter was caught up in those forces that worked against Antinomianism. He was a willing participant in the seventeenth-century rise of moralism, he was a prominent member of the Presbyterian camp, and his narrow escape from the clutches of Antinomianism occurred during the tumultuous years of the English Civil War.

Indeed, it is this historical context of national crisis that does most to explain his subsequent hostility to Antinomianism. Before he encountered that upheaval he was a limited supporter of Antinomian doctrines, but this experience turned him around. For a start, there were some who preached and published the principles of Antinomianism with unprecedented freedom. In particular, Baxter witnessed a disturbing transformation in his close friends; Antinomianism corrupted their lives and opinions. His shock at seeing what such doctrine could do sparked his decision to enter the army as chaplain, and once there he began to link this doctrine with the events he witnessed around him. He

connected a general uprising against established authority with a particular doctrine that denied the rulership of Christ. Such disorder in the religious sphere, he and so many of his contemporaries believed, inexorably ushered in similar disorder in the political and social; and when Charles I lost his head Baxter saw the essence of Antinomian doctrine worked out in practice.

This concern prompted Baxter to launch a campaign against Antinomianism. He carried it on in public, beginning with his all-important *Aphorismes of Justification*, and in private, in correspondence with individuals who demonstrated the slightest Antinomian inclinations. Over time, though, the nature of the label "Antinomian" and what it revealed about Baxter changed. It became more a label of abuse than a signifier of his inner fears. Indeed, when England finally settled down into some sort of stability, and once its new Protector demonstrated a strong commitment to magistracy and ministry, Baxter's fears subsided. They had effectively vanished by 1657, so his crusade was no longer necessary, and in 1664 he complacently claimed the credit for the extinction of Antinomianism.

The pattern is very clear, and it was soon to be repeated in the 1670s and 1690s. These later phases were indeed separated by whole decades and significant developments, but there were fundamental continuities running through them. The 1640s was the important key. In the 1670s Baxter was blaming the Independents and the spirit of separation generally for England's past upheavals. The trauma of the civil wars now reflected not just an Antinomian disrespect for authority, but an Independent propensity for division and separation. And in the late 1660s and early 1670s the spirit of separation seemed to be advancing in England. Baxter called off his renewed attack on the Independents' Antinomianism only when he entertained a flirtation with their

ecclesiological model, yet even he was coming to see its limited impact. It is important to understand that in this period Baxter used the word "Antinomian" only as a means to discredit his opponent, it was not an expression of any inner fears.

This, however, was not true of the 1690s recrudescence of Baxter's anti-Antinomianism, which had subtle contextual connections with its earliest appearance. In 1690 Tobias Crisp rose up to haunt him, bringing his Antinomianism with him, at a time when another new and promising ruler of England was vulnerable. Baxter's outrage, horror and dismay were palpable; his reaction was immediate, aggressive, intense and predictable. Once again Baxter was beset by fears of the damage this despised doctrine could do to honest but ignorant souls. By comparison, nothing like it ever occurred in the 1660s or the 1680s. In those decades, Baxter might almost have been a different man.

It has also been demonstrated that this clear pattern of Baxter's opposition to Antinomianism affected his own interpretation and his public expression of soteriological truth. First, the soteriological system which he constructed for himself in the later 1640s was the mirror image of Antinomianism. In virtually every aspect it was the reverse of the soteriology of Crisp and Saltmarsh. So if a label is to be applied to Baxter at all, it should be that of "anti-Antinomian". It is negative and awkward, but no other word will capture so well what really shaped and defined his soteriology. This is reason enough to conclude that Antinomianism had a major - if negative - impact on Baxter's own soteriological position. And it continued to do so. After a few years - when his outbursts against Antinomianism had thinned out, other concerns had crowded in, and his anxiety over the threat of Antinomianism had dissipated - his own soteriological inclinations reverted to something like their earlier Calvinism.

Not only did Antinomianism affect the construction of Baxter's soteriology, it also influenced the way in which he presented it to his audience. The *Aphorismes of Justification* in 1649 and his *Treatise of Conversion* in 1657, for example, place their emphases in very different places. By the late 1650s it was Roman Catholic-style soteriology that threatened, not Antinomianism, and Baxter altered his message accordingly. Even in later periods of recrudescence his theological emphasis was pushed towards Arminianism. He never actually embraced Arminianism, but his emphases were enough to show that he had, for a while at least, abandoned his previous Calvinist gloss. Each time Antinomianism functioned as the catalyst for this transformation. Provoked by a combination of dislike for its adherents, discovery of its direction and distrust of his audience, Baxter tipped the balance of his soteriological scales in an Arminian direction. Clearly Antinomianism exerted a powerful influence indeed.

This thesis has revealed much about the pattern of Baxter's concern over Antinomianism, and it has been suggestive about the nature of Antinomianism itself. The deeper question is why Antinomianism aroused so many fears in England generally, and in Baxter in particular. Here the analysis of J. C. Davis and Kai Erikson has been helpful. Both Davis and Erikson applied their insights to communities, but here they have been applied to a single member of a community, albeit a vocal and prominent one. Antinomianism, especially in the 1640s, was Baxter's way of reinforcing and recovering what was precious, and threatened; by defining Antinomianism as a doctrine beyond the pale, Baxter was implicitly prescribing what should lie within it. This explains why Baxter's soteriological system was the inverse image of Antinomianism. If his new theology reinforced what he valued most, Antinomianism attacked what was most precious to him. Thus Antinomianism - or rather, Baxter's fierce reaction to it - was the

embodiment of his search for security in troubled times. Not only that, Antinomianism could function as an explanatory device, one which provided reassurance that a problem defined could also be solved. As a result the Antinomians assumed a significance in Baxter's mind well beyond their actual strength and numbers.

Of course, much the same can be said of the Antinomian debate in general. Obviously it too was strident in one decade, yet silent in the next. As it did with Baxter, so Antinomianism touched a raw nerve in England, it grated on fundamental sensibilities, and it played on deeper anxieties than just theological niceties. Indeed, in a world such as seventeenth-century England where the Bible was the most important source of conceptual understandings, theological debate could easily disguise more temporal concerns. It is essential, then, to recognise that Antinomianism evoked a number of fears that were social rather than theological: it appeared to reward those who least deserved it; it worked in favour of those whose effort was insufficient; it released the indolent and immoral from any claims on their behaviour and any threat of punishment; and it threatened havoc to social conventions, mutual obligations and social stability. Because Antinomianism brushed up against so many sensitive issues it inflamed prolonged and heated debate at those times - the 1640s especially - when these very issues were under threat.

Antinomianism, therefore, has been a surprisingly useful avenue into the seventeenth century and a deeper understanding of Baxter, in two ways. First, the doctrine itself - justification by free grace alone through faith alone - is revealing. On the face of it, it seems merely the obscure and wild speculations of a few on the fringe. Yet if that is so it would never have occupied the attentions or the affections of so many, nor would it have continued to do so long after the "English Revolution" had failed. Linked

as it was to the roots of English Protestantism, it was a much more significant, more mainstream and more conservative part of English life than has previously been supposed. Second, Antinomianism is important as a polemical construct. It reveals many of the fears and concerns of those, like Baxter, who built it and used it, either to ward off those fears or to discredit an opponent. Ultimately the curious and complex nature of the Antinomian debate means that more is revealed about Baxter than about Antinomianism itself. Baxter's was certainly a rich and deep career; Antinomianism is a window that, once opened, brings a fresh breeze and new light to our understanding of it.

Appendix A

THE *RELIQUIAE BAXTERIANAE* (1696)

Richard Baxter's autobiography, the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, is a vital historical source that requires careful handling. To begin with, it is in some ways the product of several different contexts. Baxter wrote most of it in the mid-1660s, yet in its first part he surveys his life before the Restoration. As the work progresses it comes more closely into contact with its context; Baxter wrote the third part of the book in fragments from his immediate recollection. Yet the book as a whole only appeared five years after his death, and decades after many of the events he described. To compound matters it exists not in just one version, but in four!¹

The version used in this thesis is the first published version, edited by Baxter's loyal friend Matthew Sylvester, which appeared in 1696. Sylvester, William Lamont explains, laboured with fretful faithfulness to reproduce the whole story, so much so that it became "an appalling labour of love...[and] the triumph of loyalty over literature. It is a sprawling monster", Lamont continues, "containing everything but Baxter's laundry list".² The book certainly is a burden to its reader, and there is an urgent need for a balanced and informed critical edition.

¹ Lamont discusses these different versions in *Millennium*, pp. 79-82.

² William Lamont, "The Religious Origins Of The English Civil War", in Gordon Schochet (ed.), *Religion, Resistance, and Civil War. Proceedings of the Folger Institute Center for the History of British Political Thought*, vol. 3, Washington D. C., 1990, p. 6. See also Lamont, *Millennium*, p. 79, for similar comments.

The question of context is important because of its implications for Baxter's intended audience. N. H. Keeble points out that Baxter must have had only one audience in mind when he wrote it: posterity. Baxter desired to leave behind a true record of those tumultuous times through which he had lived. In large part he sought "to exonerate himself" and set "the record straight".³ Thus the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* is in important ways, as Conal Condren rightly points out, "an act of exorcism".⁴ Lamont picks up the fact, connecting it with context, warning historians not "to ignore why he wrote [his memoirs] (retrospective special pleading), when he wrote them (under the constraints of Restoration censorship), and editorial tampering".⁵ The *Reliquiae Baxterianae* was essentially a careful exercise in self-vindication.

Thus the *Reliquiae* is the product of a number of contextual, personal and editorial influences, and it is far from a straightforward account of Baxter's life. After all, he himself admitted that "[c]onscienable mens Histories are true; but if they be also wise, they tell us but some part of the Truth, concealing that which would do harm, and which the depraved world cannot bear without abusing it".⁶ The historian is forced to tread carefully, then, to work out the compulsions behind what is being said, as well as detecting what has been omitted; to sense the presence of bias and subjectivity while distinguishing the priorities of audience and reception; and to trace the effect of later thinking and circumstances applied retrospectively to earlier events. It simply will not do to believe that "though the story is [Baxter's] own, we may safely trust him. There is an unmistakably honest ring about the man".⁷

³ Keeble, "Autobiographer as Apologist", pp. 110-111.

⁴ Condren, *George Lawson's Politica*, p. 142.

⁵ Lamont, *Puritanism and historical controversy*, p. 6.

⁶ Baxter, *Life of Margaret*, epistle to the reader.

⁷ John Brown, "Richard Baxter, the Kidderminster Pastor", p. 169.

A good illustration of all this is Baxter's explanation for his life of considerable ill health. Baxter offered two causes for his condition, but never at the same time. The best-known cause, youthful dietary excess, is that which he laid out in his *Reliquiae Baxterianae*. "I was much addicted to the excessive gluttonous eating of Apples and Pears; which I think laid the foundation for that Imbecility and Flatulency of my Stomach, which caused the Bodily Calamities of my Life".⁸ Shadows of Augustine are cast across the background of this explanation; he had also stolen fruit from his neighbour's orchard.⁹ An appeal to a certain genre, then, but this was an explanation that Baxter stuck to throughout his account in the *Reliquiae*. Later he lamented an "unsuitable diet in my youth",¹⁰ and ten years on he was "fully satisfied, that (by ill Diet, Old Cheese, Raw Drinks and Salt Meats) whatever it is, I contracted [my disease] before Twenty Years of Age, and since Twenty One or Twenty Two, have had just the same Symptoms as now at Seventy".¹¹

Of course, Baxter did not confine this explanation just to the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*; many of his works have an autobiographical flavour. For example, in *Obedient Patience*, published in 1683, he confessed that a "sinful pleasing of my appetite with raw apples, pears, and plums, when I was young, did lay the foundation of my incurable diseases".¹² Clearly, such an explanation could also serve a useful pastoral purpose. And right at the end of his life, Baxter continued to bewail the damage of his early diet.

Though my Appetite inclined only to the coursest and poorest Diet, yet therein I pleased it foolishly and sinfully to the utter ruine of my Health... . My delightful Diet was so much in Apples, and Pears, and Plumbs, and Cheese that possess my Stomach early with an incurable

⁸ *Rel. Bax.* I. 2.

⁹ J. G. Pilkington (trans.), *The Confessions of St. Augustin*, in Philip Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids, 1983, vol. 1, p. 57.

¹⁰ *Rel. Bax.*, I. 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III. 174.

¹² *Obedient Patience: Works*, III. 933.

excessive Flatulency, and my veins with remediless Obstructions, and bred so long and violent a Cough.¹³

Once again this was followed by an admission of theft, a “Sin that *Austin* himself confesseth”.¹⁴

This was Baxter’s standard explanation for his life of sickness, but as so often in the *Reliquiae* it is not the whole truth. During the 1650s he had offered a vastly different explanation for his ill health, one that was too politically dangerous to be made during the Restoration period. In 1647, after four years in parliament’s army, Baxter’s health collapsed with disastrous effect. He was all too willing to advertise that sacrifice of his health to demonstrate his loyalty to the parliamentary cause. In 1649 he expressed his amazement to John Warren that anyone could doubt his respect “to the State or common good” when he had endured so much in the army “to the utter overthrow of my body”.¹⁵ A year later he explained this with more detail to his friends in the army, then in Scotland:

you must thinke that a man will not be very prone to oppose that partye, with whom he hath so zealously joyned in their greatest adversity, and endured so many cold stormes, and unseasonable marches, and lain out of doores so many raining nights together, and bin in so many bloody fights, as I have bin in the space of 4 yeares and a halfe; and contracted so many sicknesses to my body, and at last even death it selfe; which is to me even at the doore in all probability, occasioned by these distemperings of my body.¹⁶

In 1651 he protested his loyalty once again. Then he wrote “uppon accusations that I was against the Government because I preacht against their daies of fasting and of thanksgiving for victories in Scotland”. He responded indignantly,

I have brought my body to the pit brinke by 4 yeares service to the Parliament in warres; soe was I never a freind to Tyranny nor had any repynning thoughts at Gods part in the chang[e]s of our Government whatever I thought of the meanes.¹⁷

¹³ Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵ Baxter to John Warren, 11 September 1649: DWL MS BC vi. 98r (CCRB #22).

¹⁶ Baxter to Friends in the Army, [c.June 1650]: DWL MS BC ii. 269v (CCRB #41).

¹⁷ Baxter to a Judge, 7 April 1651: DWL MS BC i. 260r (CCRB #60).

Baxter was not afraid to make this fact public when he published his *Apology*. There he admitted that his years in the army had caused “*the ruining of my bodily health*”.¹⁸

This explanation all but disappeared after 1660. His 1647 crisis was played down in the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* at a time when Baxter simply could not afford to heighten the considerable distrust that surrounded him. Instead he turned his earlier explanation on its head, arguing in a 1684 letter to Stephen Lobb that he willingly suffered the loss of his health “by striving in vaine to have prevented our overturnings”.¹⁹ Judicious hindsight had transformed loyalty into opposition. Baxter’s caution was well justified. His brief mention of his army experience was enough for the vigilant Samuel Young. “Riding in the Army did me much good, saith he. Yes, but it did the King none, when he [Baxter] Animated the Soldiers to Fight Briskly against him”.²⁰ Baxter wrote his account with just such a hostile reader in mind; he was determined not to let such a critical account prevail, and even his sickness was not immune. It is very clear, from this example at least, that the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* should be handled with care.

Having said all this, though, the historian can make use of the *Reliquiae* in a fruitful way. It is possible to detect those points at which Baxter revealed less than the whole truth. This can be done by comparing his autobiography with his correspondence. Together they make clear the full range of possible causes of his frequent ill health, for example. It can also be achieved by comparing the *Reliquiae* with other publications, especially earlier ones. For instance, Baxter’s claim to have once been ensnared in mild Antinomianism is plausible because he describes that condition in detail in his *Aphorismes*, written sometime in 1647 and 1648. Also, the frequent references to his close (but corrupted) friends in the army are scattered through numerous works from

¹⁸ Baxter, *Rich. Baxters Apology*, epistle dedicatory.

¹⁹ Baxter to S[tephen?] L[obb?], [early June 1684]: DWL MS BC ii. 93r (CCRB #1139).

²⁰ Young, *Vindiciae Anti-Baxterianae*, pp. 4-5.

nearer the time. Furthermore, an understanding of those areas that demanded most sensitive handling by Baxter will help to uncover the pitfalls in his recollections. For instance, it is only too reasonable to assume that when Baxter remembered his work in the army he would emphasise political concerns - preventing the overturning of traditional government - over soteriological concerns - which were so much more personal and immediate to him in 1645. And, finally, it is possible to distil the effects of hindsight. It is hardly likely, for instance, that Baxter understood the rising political and religious temperature of the whole army in just that one night at Naseby. Such clarity was impossible at the time.

In conclusion, the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* is a complicated source that must be used with extreme care. The point is, though, that it can be used. Armed with a cautious distrust, and aware of potential areas of distortion, the historian can extract from this difficult book an understanding of Richard Baxter that is both accurate and illuminating.

Appendix B

UNDATED TREATISE

This undated, unfinished and untitled treatise is an important document because it draws together in a few short, intense pages the main strands of Baxter's opposition to the Antinomians.¹ It captures in his own words and style the "atmosphere" of his antagonism, something not always possible in historical prose. It also explains in part the biographical context of his hostility, it clarifies his perception of the state of religion (and his fellow ministers) in England in the late 1640s, and it makes some connection with the upheaval of "these dangerous times".

Any attempt to provide some context for the piece is necessarily speculative. It is more than plausible, however, that Baxter wrote it during the last quarter of 1649, at about the same time as he was first replying to John Warren. (It is placed alongside those papers in the treatises, and it is crafted in a similar quality of script.) The purposes for which he constructed it are a mystery, but after the poor reception of his Aphorismes of Justification he may have intended to publish it in an attempt to intensify his campaign against the Antinomians. It is almost certainly unfinished, and the historian is left to ponder why Baxter chose not to pursue it. After the failure of the Aphorismes he may have doubted any success that printed way.

Of all the errours that the Church hath bin pestered with in these dangerous times, there are few that I could apprehend my selfe clearlyer called out against than those of that people commonly called Antinomians.

ffor 1. I lived long on the borders of that evill my selfe, partly through my fierce opposition to the Arminians, being driven too neere the contrary extreame; and partly by following blindly Dr [William] Twisse, Mr [William] Pemble, [Johannes] Maccovius² and some other great Divines, who dispute against Arminians with Antinomian arguments,

¹ The piece is found in DWL MS BT xiv. 1v-2v, item #325. Paragraphing has been added. It is discussed above, pp. 191-193.

² For these three figures respectively, see Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, pp. 80-88, 71-80 and 229. Twisse had a particularly significant influence on Baxter.

asserting the doctrines of 'Justification before ffaith, either as an Immanent Act in God, or as an Immediate fruit of Christs death, &c.' And ergo thought it my duty to do as men that have scaped a quicksand to set up a mark and leave behind me, that others might beware.

2. And specially because there is no one sort of men of any erronious opinion that so ordinarily fall to wicked and licentious lives, in so much that it is very rare in my experience to find any old confirmed Antinomians that prove not notoriously vile: So that even the Lord Brooke in his treatise of Episcopacy doth judge that the sort of men of whom the Apostle foretellet those hainous evils 2 Tim. 3.1 to 11 were these men that should come in these later times. I would as sooner trust a Turke, and sooner a Papist by far, than a true Antinomian. And indeed, how should it be otherwise, when almost all their doctrines directly lead towards it.

And God hath confirmed me herein by his judgments from heaven. For besides his giving them over to scandalls and wickedness, he did by little lesse than Miracles in those Monsters in New England, speake plainly to the world his detestation of their opinions. And Miracles are so unusuall in these later ages, that when God speaketh by them, he is obdurate in rebellion that will stop his eares. I believe that Arminianisme is a doctrine of errour, and many more the like: but did God ever give such a Testimony against them? or doth he give them over to such wickednes[s], and satanicall delusions and enthusiasticke madnes[s] as usually the Antinomians are given over to?

When I had searched into the bottom of this dungeon of new light, or dunghill of filth, I found clearly that their Doctrine had two most powerful means to propogate it, and two Errours above all the rest, which were supporting pillars on which that whole building stood. Among others, the two great promoters of this mischief are these.

1. One is, the Plausible title of ffree Grace, which is still in their mouthes, and which is a mighty engine of that Evill spirit, who transformeth himself into an angell of light, to deceive silly soules, that know not wherein the nature of ffree Grace doth consist. It seemeth to them to be a singular honour to Jesus Christ to say Hee is all, and they are Nothing, and to lay all on him, and be nothing themselves; which in a right sense is right, but in their sense is mortall. I verily thinke that the name of ffree Grace, and an ignorant conceit of extolling the spirit (out of his owne way) doth far more powerfully draw men to despise that free Grace, and turn it into wantonnes[s] while they thinke they magnify it and to reject it and trample underfoot the blood of the Covenant while they extoll it, and do despite to the spirit of grace, while they cry up the spirit, than most engines that ever satan till this day hath made use of.

2. The second and yet greater advantage to the Antinomian Kingdome, is many Divines of great esteeme in the Church do favour or plainly assert the very pillars and principall of their errours which will introduce many of the rest, and countenance almost all; and the credit of these Divines first draweth young Christians that way, and then is a defence to the whole masse of errours. How did Mrs Hutchinson in New England boast of Mr [John] Cotton? What cause shee had the N[ew] E[ngland] Divines best know: If there were any, I hope miraculous providences have healed it. And this unhappy fate I have observed to befall Divines on these occasions.

1. It cannot be hid that the multitude of Divines among us are of weake headpieces and partes, and not able to make any deepe discoveries, but receive most of their Divinity uppon trust, and go in a gang. And (as Pemble truly saith) There is no greater enemy to sound learning and knowledge than to make use of other mens understanding, neglecting our owne: as those that have a library in their memory, by

much reading, and yet little cleare apprehension of truthes by serious studying it in its naked evidence.

2. And too many Divines are deluded with the bare name of ffree Grace, and a mistaken pretence of extolling Christ and the spirit, as well as the people.

3. And too many also when they perceive such doctrine best please many of the godly of their people, and that it is in credit among them to preach that which they call ffree Grace, they goe as neere that way of error as ever they dare to please their people and keepe their credit. It is not in this point only, that the Censoriousnes[s] of the people (who will needes teach their teachers, and cry them up while they humour their fancies, and cry them down when they do not) and the basenes[s] of ministers (that will comply with the humours of the censorious professors, against their owne judgment, and will follow the fancies of those whom they should guide and lead) hath proved the reproach of the ministry and the plague and misery of the Church and land: Many a knowing Divine in England now laments it, that the violence of the crowd, and the humorousness of such censorious ones, hath drawne them beyond their owne principles, and into those violent courses which all have smarted for. And yet succeeding ministers will not be warned by this late repentance of their foregoers.

4. But the most potent meanes of all the rest to draw Divines too neere Antinomianisme hath been contentions and disputations with Papists and Arminians, which in their heate and partiality hath turned them off into the other extreame. It is a most difficult thing to be deeply engaged in any controversye and not to be carryed as far on the other side: while men bend all their wittes what to say to silence or disparage the cause of their adversary, but never consider whither it tends, or what danger there may be on the other hand. One would wonder to see in the doctrine of Affliction [for sins], Assurance and many others, what difference there is betweene the writings of many of our Divines when they deal with a Papist, and when they deale with an Antinomian!

The two great errours of the Antinomian doctrine which I told you are the pillars that support the whole fabricke of this house of dagon, are these.

1. The first is That the Covenant of Grace is Absolute: or hath no Condition on our part. This is a serpent that hath a 100 in its bowells.

[2.] The second is, that we are Justified or absolutely Reconciled to God before we Believe or were borne, which is maintained on two different groundes: 1. Either because Justification and Remission are Immanent Acts of God, & ergo must be from eternity or 2. because Christ having fully satisfied for our sins, they think we must needes be justified and pardoned as soone as Christ had satisfied; as if these were Immediate fruites of the death of Christ, or the satisfaction made thereby.

He that hath these two opinions is an Antinomian though he do not know it. ffor take these for granted, and it is easie to maintaine all or most of the rest. Now (with sorrow of heart I write it) many of our owne Divines do come too neare them in one or both of the forementioned errours: and some do flatly maintaine them both: Though the generality of Learned and Moderate Divines do flatly disclaime them.³

Yea, let me add a third which is more dangerous and of greater influence into the Antinomian syntagma than either of the former, which is, That Christ did in so strict a sence Represent the persons of those he dyed for, that they may be said in a morrall

³ Baxter's caution here is intriguing, and he may well have had John Warren's reproach in mind. Warren had accused Baxter of being too critical of England's ministers (see above p. 171 and Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp. 45, 51). Baxter is still critical in this treatise, but he treads more carefully and even concedes that the "generality" of England's divines "disclaime" this Antinomian doctrine. He never offered that concession to Warren.

Legall sense to have themselves obeyed and satisfyed in him. If I believed this I would be an Antinomian tomorrow.

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2. Other Works
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² Consistency is a difficult challenge when it comes to seventeenth-century book titles, but every attempt has been made to achieve it. Italics, bold type and capital letters for whole words have been silently omitted, but initial capitalisation has been retained. Parts of those titles where the length is excessive have also been omitted, but their integrity has always been preserved. When a treatise is published with its own pagination as part of a larger work, both are listed in the bibliography. The only exception to this is Baxter's practical works, for which only the short title is given. Since they play an important part of this thesis they have been listed individually.

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